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Annual Subscription, \$15.00.

April 25, 1889.

A WAGABOND LOVER

BY

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AUTHOR OF "MISS KATE," "SHEBA," ETC., ETC.

Frank F. Lovell & Co., Publishers,
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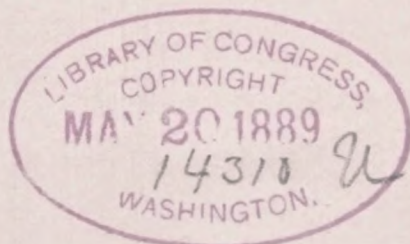
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AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF A TURKISH BATH," "SHEBA," "MISS KATE,"
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A VAGABOND LOVER.

CHAPTER I.

“IS IT, KISMET?”

PICCADILLY at midnight!

The tide of human life ebbs and flows beneath the glare of gaslight and the softer, purer lustre of moon and stars; and under the light of both—unabashed by the betrayal of the one, or untouched by the purity of the other—the hordes of painted women and painted men jostle and crowd the brilliant thoroughfare, a terrible satire on all that constitutes the civilized life of a great city.

Vice, frivolity, idleness, the waste of youth, the debasing influence of human passions, the folly and vanity and extravagance of miscalled pleasure, here are throned and worshipped—the gods of the hour and the century.

Passing and re-passing, a kaleidoscope of colour ever shifting and changing, the faces scanned each other listlessly, or curiously, or scornfully from time to time; some impassive, as befitted citizens of the world, others marked by the greed, cruelty, lust, rapacity, weariness or woe of sated passions or dominant desires. The din of carriages, the tramp of feet, the brazen challenge of shamelessness, the witless laughter of fools, the babble of society tossed from the frequenters of clubs, the gossip and scandal of green-room and boudoir, that smirched the fame of women and loyalty of men with as complete an indifference as the smoke and blacks of the city itself manifested in its descent on “just and unjust”—all these made up an eloquent satire on the ways and doings of men as the June night slowly faded into the past.

Two men, sauntering through the crowd, overcoats on arm, cigars in mouth, glanced somewhat listlessly at the passing faces as they made their way to the regions of fashionable Clubland.

"Have you heard that Jack Trevanion has returned?" asked the younger of the two, a slight, pale, aristocratic-looking man—the Hon. Markham Errol, who was a nephew of the Duke of Oldacres, and possessed about the greatest amount of debts and the worst reputation of any man in London.

"No; has he really?" answered his companion, who was a Colonel of the Guards. "By Jove! that's odd, now I come to think of it. When did he come back?—Are you sure of it?"

"Quite; I saw him in the Park this morning. Couldn't be mistaken. There's no other fellow could pass for Jack Trevanion."

"Did you speak?"

"No; he was talking to a woman—deuced pretty creature she was, too—but I didn't know her."

"Same old game!" laughed Colonel Herbert. "Gad! what a fellow he was for women, and what running they all made for him! Yet no one knows who he is—where he came from—and men call him an adventurer behind his back?"

"Men! yes; but what does it signify what men say of him when all the women go mad for a smile or a word? As for being an adventurer—well, that is what Society always calls a person of whom it knows nothing, and can only speculate as to how he exists."

"Trevanion's mode of existence is rather a mystery," said Colonel Herbert. "Cards and an occasional *coup* at Monte Carlo would account for it, I imagine." Then he glanced quickly up at his companion. "Your cousin, Lad, Doris Marchmont, knows him, does she not?" he asked, with rather an ostentatious pretence of indifference.

"Yes," said Errol, with a frown.

"I'm sorry for it. And now she's a widow, so I suppose the acquaintance will be resumed. The secret of his fascination seems to be that there's nothing he hasn't

done or can't do, leaving alone the fact that he's out and out the handsomest man to be found in the four capitals of fashion."

"He certainly is gloriously handsome," said Errol, thoughtfully. "And yet——"

"Come, come!" laughed his friend, "that's a woman's way of damning a rival—acquiescing, yet always with a 'but' or a 'yet' at the end of the sentence!"

"Rival!" said the other man, hotly; "you surely don't suppose that I ever thought, ever cared, ever looked in that direction? Lady Doris is not at all my style of woman."

"No," said Colonel Herbert, dryly, "The women we love never are 'our style.' But that doesn't prevent our being caught all the same."

"Well, I'm not caught, and don't intend to be," said Errol, with a slightly heightened colour, as he puffed his cigar smoke into the crowd. "I've seen too many of the mistakes of matrimony ever to wish to add my name to its list of victims. The days when women were content with one lover and one husband seem to be over and done with. Our wives and daughters will never be what our mothers and grandmothers were."

"Don't you think, though, they were a little bit slow—scarce a soul above the storeroom and nursery? Admirable creatures, no doubt, but decidedly heavy to get on with."

"Well, at least they were safe, and a man might trust his heart and honour to their keeping. Now, it's either a case of wilful blindness, or open scandal. Society's rotten to the core, and we all know it, yet bolster it up with lies and pretences, because not a soul among us has the moral courage to call sin by its real name."

Colonel Herbert laughed somewhat ironically. "My young friend you have taken a new departure," he said. "We shall have you lecturing in the slums, or turning into a Salvation Army preacher, or something equally appalling. Believe me it's no mortal use running your head against the brick-wall of popular human errors—otherwise the Society Chapels would have rid us of all our 'pleasant sins' long ago."

Those sins have always existed in a greater or less degree, and they always will. Here and there a solitary voice lifts itself against them, and we listen and laugh, or perhaps agree, as the mood takes us, but for all that—go on just the same. We must. Life's a treadmill and our feet are on the wheel, and we must just turn round with it, or get crushed by those behind. Look there," and he nodded in the direction of the gay and brilliant thoroughfare they were leaving. "Do you suppose a single creature of the hundreds we have passed enjoys the life he or she is pursuing? But they follow it just the same, day for day; night for night, and they would miss it if they had to break it off. Habit is a hard taskmaster who deludes his slaves into thinking themselves free. It is the most pernicious form of bondage the earth has ever known. But a truce to moralizing! There's one thing I wanted to ask you with reference to Jack Trevanion? Have you ever been sufficiently independent of the personal charm he exercises when with you to criticise the man himself?"

"What do you mean?" asked Errol, a little hurriedly, as he met the calm grey eyes of his companion.

"Exactly what I say. To put it more plainly—have you never felt that there was something—unreal—about the man? A want of human feeling, human softness, though not of human error. What he says and does, has in it and about it an indescribable but palpable difference to what most men in similar situations say and do. I can't put it more plainly—it is something rather to be *felt* than described, a thing of intuition, not of recognisable existence."

"I know," said the other man slowly, "what you mean. I, too, can't describe it in actual words. It is as if the man was—incomplete—is it not?"

"Exactly!" said the Colonel eagerly. "Yet analyse him how you may, you find nothing wanting. His gifts are almost genius, his manners are perfect, his courage undoubted, his capabilities almost limitless. His physique would make a Hercules envious, and he possesses that rare combination of chivalry and gentleness, strength and reck-

lessness, which is so irresistibly attractive to women. Then what is it he lacks?"

"Something that is in most men, and that nature has omitted in his case," said the younger man, thoughtfully. "I have felt it as you say, but I cannot describe it in actual words."

"Suppose;" said Colonel Herbert, dropping his voice to graver and more earnest tones. "Suppose we agree, you and I, to find out the mystery about him. He is deep enough, and close enough, Heaven knows; but for all that, we may contrive to get to the bottom of him, and I confess I should like to satisfy myself about the man for my own sake."

"And I, for the sake of my cousin, Lady Doris," said Errol. "I should be sorry to see her throw herself away on an adventurer—a graceless vagabond who lives by his wits, and pays his debts with a chance *coup* at the gaming table."

"Hush!" said the other suddenly, giving a warning touch to the arm linked within his own. "There he is, himself, Talk of——ahem!"

A man standing on the steps of the Orient Club lifted his hat slightly as the two friends approached. He did not speak, only looked at them, calmly, expectantly, as if waiting for them to take the initiative.

Colonel Herbert extended his hand. "Why Trevanion," he said. "Back in the old country once more. Where do you hail from this time?"

"South Africa," answered the man addressed as Trevanion.

His voice had a singular charm in its rich, full tones, and as he turned and accompanied the two men into the vestibule of the Club it was only too evident that their praises of his physique had not been exaggerated. He was handsome enough to attract attention and admiration wherever he appeared.

Tall, erect, and splendidly proportioned, he carried himself with a certain stately, stag-like grace, more like that of some son of the desert, some creature of primeval forests and free and wind-swept wilds, than the descendant of an

effete and stunted civilization to whom has been given the honour of producing the "Masher" and the "Dude."

That natural grace, born of perfect self-possession, and perfect indifference, distinguished every look, motion, and gesture. His face was singularly impassive, despite the keen brightness of the eyes. They were eyes eminently watchful and observant, yet too well schooled for self-betrayal. In colour of the darkest, deepest blue, almost approaching to violet, they looked black as night from under the shade of their dark lashes.

Taken altogether he was a man difficult to describe. A man who would personally confront such description and proclaim it inadequate; a man who would overthrow supposition and speculation by doing or saying something the very reverse of what had been expected of him; a man you might study and analyze for years, and yet who would still be capable of forcing you to re-adjust your mental lens, and begin the task anew.

Errol and his friend soon found themselves yielding to the old charm, subjugated by the old sense of wonder and admiration, as they strolled into the smoking-room of the Orient listening to Trevanion's description of Boerland and Zululand, and inclined to be envious of adventures that borrowed life afresh from the graphic powers of their narrator's fluent description.

Man after man joined that circle, and one and all seemed subjugated by the charm that radiated from its centre. *Blasé*, sated, indifferent as most of them were to emotions or sensations, they yet thrilled with something more akin to excitement than their usual tepid interest allowed; perhaps sighed a little enviously as they looked at that splendid physique, that incarnation of manhood's strength and grace and beauty, with still the dew of youth in the clear, bright eye, and on the smooth brow, unscored as yet by touch of Care or Time. There was something decidedly contagious in his vitality, and it was obvious even if unacknowledged. Just as long as he chose or desired, he kept the circle of men around him, awakening discussion and leading up to confidences without any outward manifestation of curiosity. Then, having learned

all he cared or desired to learn of events that had occupied his two years of absence, he relaxed his attention, and gradually the men drew off and drifted their several ways, some to the card-room, some to study the latest telegrams, some to various haunts fashionable, or shady, as the case might be.

Jack Trevanion at last found himself alone in the luxurious smoking-room, with its Moorish tables and divans.

He threw himself full length on one of the latter, and there lay on the soft pile of cushions, shading his eyes from the light with one hand, the other still held his half-smoked cigar, but it hung listlessly by his side. He seemed lost in deep thought.

"Free!" he muttered at last. "God! to think of it! Free now! Does she remember, I wonder? Has she ever thought—ever once in all those long months? No. She is too proud, too cold. How could I expect her to unbend? If it had been Hilda, now——"

The sound of a step broke across the stillness. He half raised himself, and saw one of the attendants approaching with a letter on a Moorish salver.

He took it and glanced at the superscription with a slight smile. "When did this come?" he asked.

"By special messenger, sir," answered the man, "just a few minutes ago."

He nodded dismissal, and the man left the room. Once more alone, his eyes scanned the contents with an indifference that suddenly broke into interest. The letter was brief, but as characteristic of the writer as its delicate perfume, and its dashing irregular characters.

"MY DEAR JACK,—

"So you are back once more. Connie Belmont told me she met you in the Park this morning. Come and lunch with me to-morrow, at two. Perhaps if I tell you the lovely widow, Lady Doris Marchmont, will be with me also, you will be more disposed to favour my humble *ménage*. I'm sorry to say things are no better with us

than they were two years ago. Is it really two years? How time flies and—debt accumulates! Hoping to see you, for the sake of ‘old days,’

“Believe me,

“Yours always sincerely,

“HILDA ST. MAUR.

“Park Mansions,

“June 30th.”

He folded up the missive. Its scent touched him with faint and subtle memories—subtle as the woman herself, who had loved and wooed him desperately and unsuccessfully before he went into that sudden voluntary exile, giving no reason for so doing, and assigning no date for return, even to those who considered they had a right to ask it.

“Kismet,” he said, and laughed softly in the stillness of the young day. “On the very threshold of my return the chance is given me. Shall I take it or not? Is she to be won still? Or am I to know over again the passion and longing and despair from which I fled? How neatly Hilda baits the trap! I wonder if *she* knows I am here once more, within sound—sight—touch of her? Oh, queen of mine! so fair and cold and proud, how strange it seems to think of meeting you again! But how far more strange that, amidst a world of women, lovely, aye, and loving too, none should have touched my heart or wakened one throb of real feeling save you, and you alone! Will you send me from you now, as you did two years ago? Shall I give you the chance, or myself the torture? Bah! what fools we are at best! With all our boasted wisdom, with every resource of science and research, we can’t lift the veil of the future by so much as an inch, and thereby save ourselves, or others, the suffering and the misery that follow one little mistake on the road of Life. If I knew, now, to-night, whether to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to Hilda St. Maur, how would it affect my future?”

Then he sighed, and slowly rose and paced the room with restless, uneven steps. “If only Mandhar Ram were

here!” he said, involuntarily. “Yet, should I believe him if his prophecies went against my own inclinations? I believe not. . . . No; better trust to Fate! *I will go!*”

CHAPTER II.

“WOMEN—AND WOMEN.”

How the St. Maurs lived and kept up appearances as they did was a mystery to everyone who knew them.

They occupied a flat sufficiently near the Park to be charged an exorbitant rent for every square foot of its limited accommodation. Exquisitely designed and appointed, it still served as an excuse for such modest entertainments as luncheons, dinners, and “little suppers” in lieu of balls and “at homes” given by people who possessed what Hilda St. Maur designated as “a whole house of their own.”

To hear her talk, one would have imagined that a house was a luxury only to be attained by a favoured few, and when any of her numerous acquaintances would tell her that the rent she paid for her flat would have covered twice over what a house would have cost, possessed of three times its space and convenience, she only shrugged her pretty shoulders and declared it was impossible. She could not believe it. But then it was one of her characteristics never to believe anything she did not wish. Those who knew her well enough to know this, never wasted time in endeavouring to alter either a whim or an opinion once she had expressed them.

She was a very pretty little woman, with a delicate white skin and large dark eyes, and a profusion of artistically-coloured red-gold hair. She had charming manners, when she liked, seductive and caressing, and without a vestige of the malice and selfishness that ruled her heart and nature. She was capricious, but never impolitic. She had too many debts and too many extravagant tastes to offend

anyone who was useful or generous in the matter of loans, or the passports of Society.

She was virtually only a hanger-on to its fringes, but she preferred the fast and *risqué* side of it to that which took its cue from what she termed "the slowest Court that British dulness and propriety had ever engendered!" She spent her life in a perpetual whirl of excitement, alternating with fits of hysterics and despair when duns were more than usually pressing, or her husband more than usually unfortunate in the way of backing racers, for which he had a weakness only equalled by a uniformity of ill luck.

Then there were "scenes" that shook the very walls of the luxurious flat, and were liberally spiced by marital recriminations. Still they lived together as many other Society husbands and wives continue to live, seeing as little of each other as they possibly could, and equally averse to the payment of any debts as long as credit was obtainable.

It wanted a few moments to her usual luncheon hour, when Hilda St. Maur came into her pretty drawing-rooms, where the daylight was only permitted to filter through softly-tinted blinds, in consideration of fashionable complexions. She glanced rapidly round. The room opened into a smaller one, where she usually sat to "receive" visitors, a room exquisitely decorated and appointed according to the latest tenets of Art.

It was at present occupied by a woman—a woman whose stately and serene grace seemed somehow to rebuke all the fantasies and fripperies crowded together in a heterogeneous mixture of styles and epochs that had delighted as fantastic a mistress. She wore a very simple gown, a rich black silk, with soft folds of white China *crêpe* crossing the bust and narrowing into the delicate rounded waist.

But she might have worn cotton or sackcloth, and yet looked a picture in either, being one of those fortunately-gifted woman (rare indeed) whose clothes owe more to them than they owe to their clothes. Her figure was too perfect for dressmakers or tailors to spoil or improve, her face with its lovely fair skin and delicate bloom and dark-lashed grey eyes and framework of rich fair hair—really *fair*, not gold or saffron, or red—was, if anything a little too faultless and a

little too cold. But the first defect was excusable enough, and the second left always the hope of amendment if any one could flatter himself or herself into the belief that they had awakened interest or regard.

She had educated herself into a critical and almost discontented frame of mind with her century and her surroundings. She was very accomplished, and she rated intellect very highly—far more highly than her Society approved of, or indeed considered necessary. She had married at eighteen to please her family—married enormous wealth, as indeed seems the fashion of nineteenth century aristocracy of either sex, and now at twenty-five found herself a widow, free and unencumbered, an object of envy to all her female friends and acquaintances, and the "coming match" for all ambitious lordlings, or enterprising commoners.

Such was Lady Doris Marchmont, who now rose to meet her hostess, receiving embraces and excuses with the same serene indifference.

"I assure you, my dear Hilda, I have not been waiting more than three or four moments," she said. Her voice was low, and very clear and sweet, a contrast to the shrill, sharp tones of the restless little woman who poured out now an incessant stream of chatter, to which her guest paid very little attention.

"The men haven't come yet," she ended. "Too bad of your cousin, but then he's always late. As for—but no—I won't tell you who is coming, at least I've asked him, only he's not had the grace to send an answer. But I hear voices, so it's all right. Now Doris, prepare for a surprise."

"Oh, my dear, *your* surprises!" said the beautiful woman, her lips curling ever so slightly as she turned away.

"Don't scoff at them so contemptuously," answered Hilda St. Maur, with a little malicious laugh, "you'll never guess who it is."

As she spoke the door was thrown open and the pretty maid-servant announced two names simultaneously. Just for one second, as she caught the name, and saw the tall, soldierly figure advancing towards them, Lady Doris' face flushed to the very temples. Then the colour ebbed back,

leaving her, if anything, even paler and colder than before. She did not move—only the hand that had been trifling with the knick-knacks on the ebony table by which she stood, pressed suddenly and heavily against it till the slender fingers looked bloodless by force of the strong pressure put upon them.

But when, having greeted his enthusiastic hostess, Jack Trevanion turned towards that quiet, stately figure, and bowed low over the extended hand, neither tremor nor emotion was visible in her face or voice.

“When did you return?” she asked him, as she might have asked the most casual acquaintance. “I had no idea you were in England.”

“I reached London two days ago,” he said. He looked at her with something like entreaty in his eyes. His face was very pale, his voice shaken and uneven by reason of strong feeling. She gave no sign of understanding the plea, or pitying the emotion, merely released her hand and turned to greet her cousin, but there came a flush to her cheek, a light to her eyes, that for long had never warmed or lightened them.

Then luncheon was announced, and she found herself on Errol’s arm, following Hilda and Trevanion to the miniature dining-room, famous already for its Bohemian entertainments.

The table was round, and the party too small for anything but general conversation. Hilda St. Maur chattered away with her usual volubility, and Trevanion seconded her conversational efforts with an ease and grace essentially his own. He had a knack of selecting words at once forcible and picturesque, words which made his description of scenes, places and people, like so many living pictures.

Gradually the indifference and listlessness vanished from Lady Doris’ face as she listened.

“How is it you have come back to the tame and spiritless life of towns?” she said at last. “You seem to have the true spirit of adventure, the spirit that has given us Burnaby, Livingstone, Stanley.”

For all answer he looked at her. The look made her

eyes droop suddenly, and her face grow warm. It recalled so much—it said so much. Yet she would not allow that he had the power to do either. She was not a woman quickly touched to any emotion, still less a woman to betray it even if experienced.

"I returned," he said, "partly because I wished—chiefly because I had received a summons to do so."

Lord Errol looked keenly at him. "A summons?" he said questioninglly

"You may call it superstition or not, as you please," went on Trevanion, his bright searching eyes still bent on the lovely flushed face opposite to him. "After all, words express very little; nothing, I always think, at all adequate to the power and fervour of thought, which has to filter through them in order to become intelligible. My summons was simply a call or demand impressed upon me. To obey it I must be in Cornwall to-morrow night."

"Cornwall?" Lady Doris said, a little eagerly. "What part of Cornwall?"

"A very desolate and dreary part, one you are not likely to know," he said. "It is on the north sea coast, near Padstow Point. My home is there, the only home I have ever known."

"And was this mysterious summons from your parents or relations, then?" asked Hilda St. Maur.

"I have no parents," he said quietly, "only an old uncle, who has been protector, and guardian, and everything else to me. He is not favourably known in the neighbourhood, chiefly because time—means—his life itself, indeed, have been entirely given up to the pursuit of science. In his youth he lived abroad, first in Germany, later on in Egypt and India. I believe he is one of the few Europeans who have penetrated into the interior of Tibet. Returning from his travels, he brought with him an extraordinary being, who early impressed himself upon my mind as one possessed of all known and unknown knowledge. He was my educator and instructor for many years. These two old men, the Oriental and the Englishman, live in a crazy tenement called Trevanion Hall, and it is there I am bound. I start by the mail train to-night."

"Is Trevanion Hall anywhere near your place, Doris?" asked Hilda St. Maur abruptly.

"About two miles distant," answered Lady Doris, coldly. She did not look at Jack Trevanion, but she felt that his glance was bent on her, and that his face had warmed into sudden eagerness.

"Two miles?" he said, "but that is Porhynna. It belongs to Sir Baldwin Treherne."

"I know," she said quietly. "But my—I mean Mr. Marchmont bought it two years ago. I spent all last summer there; it is a fine old place, but has been sadly neglected."

Jack Trevanion said no more. He longed to ask her if she was coming down there this summer, but he refrained, partly lest it should look like the suggestion of his own desires, partly because he knew that Hilda and Errol were expecting such a question.

"You must have had rather a dull life as a youngster," said Errol at length. "I suppose that's why you've made up for it of late years."

"I don't know that my life has been so much more exciting than—say, your own," answered Trevanion, coolly. "We need none of us stagnate unless we desire. Given health and strength and brains I don't see why any man should not make a career for himself, the career that best suits him. We are all too liable to let ourselves be coerced and guided in our plastic state. Afterwards—well, it is too much trouble, or not worth our while, to change the groove into which we have been thrust."

"Are you advocating wholesale rebellion against parents and guardians?" asked Hilda St. Maur laughingly. "Dangerous theories, my dear Jack!"

She always called her male acquaintances by their Christian names on as early as possible acquaintance. Sometimes their wives, or *fianceés* objected, but she only laughed at them if they did, and continued the habit.

Trevanion had no female guard to object to the saucy familiarities she pleased to bestow on him. Only Lady Doris looked a little colder and prouder than before, as she heard the expression, and Trevanion himself was a

little resentful of it. But no one ever thought of interfering with Hilda St. Maur's ways and manners. Indeed it would have been mere waste of time, temper and patience to have done so. She did as she pleased, and everyone gave in, and put up with it.

"I think," said Trevanion, in answer to her remarks, "that when the world is more enlightened, it will also learn how little right the fact or—accident—of parentage really gives us. Who knows the *real* nature of the beings they claim as their own? Apart from the sentiment attached to relationship it has very little to recommend it. In trouble, in sorrow, in difficulty, in need—in every trial, in every temptation that visits us—is it not a personal and independent warfare of ourselves against the opponent, whatever be its nature?"

"But sympathy and affection do help to ease the burden—to make the warfare lighter," said Lady Doris gravely.

"Pardon me," he said, "we fancy they do. We think, when we rush to the bed of sickness or of death, to the prison or the hospital, we are really assisting to comfort and console the mourner, or the sufferer, or the criminal; but in the depths of that suffering and that sin-stained nature it knows it is alone, that neither love nor sympathy can *really* reach it. By itself it stands, struggles, resists, or—falls. Mind you, I am not talking according to the formal or accepted rule—the laws of life and society—but of that which is *within*—the real self, a sealed letter to even our nearest and dearest."

"My dear Jack," cried Hilda St. Maur, clasping her pretty hands together in affected horror, "what has come over you? Why, you are as bad as a clergyman!"

"Worse, I think," said Errol, drily. "You cannot accuse them of giving you subject for thought. They deal with safe generalities in their ten minutes' homily, and make up for their cowardice in the matter of plain speaking, by extra zeal and devotion in all matters of ritual, and service, and church millinery. What a world it is!"

"A very good world—in its way. It would be admirable but for debts," laughed Hilda St. Maur. "Come, you are

spoiling my luncheon with your grave faces. Let us adjourn to coffee and cigarettes in my special 'den.' And for goodness' sake drop philosophy. I never could stand it—my head's too weak !”

CHAPTER III.

“WHO LOVES—REMEMBERS.”

“So you go down to Cornwall to-night ?” said Lady Doris, quietly.

She was leaning back in one of the low, luxurious *fauteils* which were scattered about in Hilda St. Maur's “den,” *i.e.*, the Turkish smoking-room which she and a few of her special favourites (male) considered the cosiest and prettiest room in the whole flat.

Lady Doris was not smoking, the other three were. Jack Trevanion had thrown himself down on a pile of cushions near his divinity. His eyes spoke very eloquently—things his lips dared not say—yet.

“Yes, to-night,” he answered her. “I wonder,” he added, sinking his voice so that it only reached her ears, “if you will favour Porhynna with a visit this summer ?”

“I never decide my plans long in advance,” she said, coldly. “Half the charm of life lies in not knowing what one is going to do, too long before one actually does it.”

“More than half the charm of life,” he said, somewhat bitterly, “lies in possessing the means of satisfying such caprices.”

“Perhaps,” she said, with the same indifference to subject and to speaker that had already ruffled him. Few things are more trying to an impetuous, passionate temperament than that apparently unmoved serenity which only a very cold or a very proud nature can present. It had often stung and irritated Jack Trevanion to madness in other days—days when he had not learnt as yet to school and control his feelings. It brought back now some of the old sense of anger and helplessness as he looked at the beautiful, calm face by his side.

"Lady Doris," he said, with a suppressed fierceness in his voice that she recognized as an echo of the past, "I wish to Heaven your world and your life had left you less perfect and more womanly. Does nothing ever move you—interest you, please you?"

"Very little, I confess," she said, and looked quietly at him. Not a flush, not a tremor of eyelid or lip betrayed whatever she might be feeling. "I am not at all an emotional person," she went on, presently.

"I think," he said, with a sudden ring of passion in his voice, "you need not tell me—that. I learnt it only too well, two years ago."

She coloured ever so faintly. "Two years," she said, "is a long time to treasure the memory of a few harsh words."

"God knows they were harsh!" he said, bitterly. "But I deserved them. Perhaps that is just what gave the sharpness to their sting. I—I suppose I ought to say I am sorry for your loss!" he went on, rapidly; "but I am not hypocrite enough to do so. I told you once I had a faithful memory."

"Is it necessary, do you think, to recall the past?" she said, as coldly as ever. "It was neither so pleasant nor so desirable that we need do so, and as for the time that has elapsed since—since——"

"Since you banished me," he interrupted, quickly.

"You flatter me. I had no such power."

"You had power enough!" he said, with suppressed passion, "to turn me into a devil from whom you or any woman might have shrunk! Proud and cold as you are, Lady Doris, I determined that you should hear—that. Not that the fact would hurt you, or give you one moment's regret."

"No she said, "because it is the foolish cant of all disappointed passions and shipwrecked vanity. What is the value of a nature that cannot withstand temptations—where the superior strength and fortitude of a man who lets himself slide downhill as rapidly as vice permits him, and excuses the folly and the sin and the shame of his wasted years by throwing the blame at a woman's feet? Do

you think we have nothing to suffer at your hands—that it costs us so little to act to our world, to hide shame and agony and humiliation? And yet we, who have the harder fight of the two, rarely turn round and accuse you of sending us to ‘the devil,’ as you so forcibly expressed it just now.”

“Your passions compared to ours are as water to wine. Your feelings are always under restraint and control by very reason of your nature and your sex,” he said, bitterly. “I—I could tell you stories of men’s love, men’s faithfulness, Lady Doris, before which all the vaunted tenderness and fidelity of women might pale. Tales I have heard by camp-fires, on the wide prairies, in the face of death and danger, in those hours when men learn how small and poor a thing life is—tales of hearts broken by a woman’s light smile or careless word, scarred and marked to their lives’ end by a blow she has dealt with her small cruel hand. But you would not care—you are not the type of woman to pity, or pardon—or love.”

The beautiful proud face turned very pale.

“You should know the ‘type,’” she said, ironically. “Few men have had greater or more varied opportunities of studying my sex than yourself.”

“What are you two discussing so gravely?” chimed in Hilda St. Maur’s ringing voice at this juncture. “Come, Jack, no confidences! They’re wasted on Doris, I assure you. She doesn’t possess a single feminine weakness. I wish I could convince her that she would be much happier if she did. Emotions and sensations are the salt of life. It is all nonsense for a woman to pretend she doesn’t think so. I don’t say they’re *safe* for us; but there’s no doubt they’re worth living for.”

“As you have proved, no doubt,” said Jack Trevanion, rising from his seat, and sauntering over to the divan by her side.

He bent his handsome head and whispered something in her ear, at which she coloured and then laughed. Lady Doris’ face never changed its serene indifference of expression. It was not her way to betray pique or jealousy, whatever she might feel,

It's all nonsense to pretend women are so much better than men," rattled on Hilda St. Maur. "Of course, poets and romancers say so, and of course it sounds pretty, and has its root and origin in a time when women were little better than slaves, and naturally became docile and meek and patient. Thank Heaven, we've changed all that; but our natures—well, I believe in the *eternel féminin*: what we wanted we've always had, what we've chosen to do we've always done, and so we always shall."

"You speak as if caprice were the sole law of woman's nature," said Lady Doris, coldly.

"So it is," said Mrs. St. Maur. "Here and there, I grant, are exceptions, who may be reasonable, but they're never agreeable—they don't make the Helens, and Cleopatras, and Marie Stuarts of the world; and they're not the type men prefer. Am I not right, Jack?"

She laid her hand on his knee and looked up in his face with her bold bright eyes.

Lady Doris felt as if a cold air had swept over her. The familiarity incensed and disgusted her, and yet, she asked herself, what right had she to feel either annoyance or disgust?

She and Jack Trevanion had parted in bitter anger two years ago. He had dared to say to her words that no man living had ever had the audacity to speak. He had wooed her boldly, passionately, recklessly, as most women love to be wooed, deny it as they may; and she had sent him from her side scourged and humiliated by the coldest and most cruel words at her command.

If he had gone to his death she would not have cared, so greatly had he outraged a pride hitherto invincible, so strangely had he moved a heart hitherto untouched to any emotion of softness, unawakened to any throb of passion; unstirred, as any deep lake's waters, by the faintest breath of that soft and subtle trouble which alone love breathes over the current of human life.

He had done all this, he had let loose a very whirlwind of passions and emotions into her well-balanced, calmly organized life; he had wooed her ardently, regardless of the world's remarks, regardless of conventionalities, of the

tie that bound her, of the society she ruled and graced; full only of his own wild love for her—the love that had ruled and well-nigh wrecked his life, that had indeed turned him into a devil often, for very pain and agony and humiliation of its impossible desires.

She thought of this now—thought and wondered with a sudden ache of heart what really these two years had been like?

It is strange that, however women may treat a man, they still like to feel they have some control over his life. They never *quite* wish their influence to pass into powerlessness. That sense of holding the reins even if the curb is slackened, is still a sense that has something in it of pride and satisfaction. They resent the violent wrenching of both from their hands, even while they pretend to relinquish them.

Something of this the Lady Doris Marchmont felt now, though she would have suffered any torture sooner than acknowledge it; though she sat there, calm, unmoved, talking but little, smiling less, yet keenly alive to every word and look and gesture that marked the intimacy between the lover she had lost, and the friend she despised.

“If he can care for her,” she thought, with sudden bitterness, and told herself they were well matched—an adventurer, a reckless unprincipled spendthrift, to whom women’s reputations had always been as thistledown to the winds of Heaven—and a woman, fast, extravagant, spoilt by her society and her age, which has taken to deifying the “rapid matron,” and to laugh to scorn the Griseldas and Yseultes that here and there bloom, lily-like, in the gardens and forcing houses of fashionable life. But though she felt bitter and angered, she was conscious of a pain that at once surprised and hurt her. It was altogether new and strange to her serene and self-contained nature. A nature lofty and grand, even in its weakness—a nature that had nothing mean or treacherous about it, and always had tried to believe the best of those she loved—even if not too ready at forgiving the worst.

It is only small souls that cram all others into their own

narrow measurements. Great ones always believe the best, and are more trustful, even if more just.

The fact of that sudden wrench, the abruptness and the storminess with which Jack Trevanion had taken himself out of her life, had made her think of him a great deal more than anything else he might have done. A year afterwards she was free. Free from a tie she had accepted because she had believed it her duty to aid the broken fortunes of her house—a tie which had given her, in her youth and beauty, to a man old enough to be her father—wealthy enough to outbid all titled candidates for her hand. A man whose name she had borne and respected, and to whom she had been loyal in word and deed—all the more so because of the utter absence of feeling on her side, and the unceasing humiliation which the greatness and devotion of an unreturned love caused her every hour of her brief wedded life.

Two years, and now the same voice echoed in her ears; the same eyes—bold, passionate, commanding—had looked back for one brief moment to hers. Unrevealing—almost cold as they were to others—they were eloquent enough to her.

She sat there quiet—almost to listlessness, but she felt every gradation of tone in the remembered voice, she grew hot and cold with the memories that started back to life, and confronted her with fresh possibilities of fresh pain. She had schooled herself into believing the past as utterly dead as the dead leaves of that sad autumn time. She could not understand how they should have so vivid and quick a resurrection.

Not in any single respect was Jack Trevanion like the hero of her fancies. She knew him to be wild, reckless, improvident, and, the world said, immoral. She could not remember any time when she heard of an unselfish action, a noble impulse, a deed of true manliness, of which he had been the hero.

Few men called him friend, and many women knew him as an enemy. Had she not also felt what her cousin and Colonel Herbert felt, that there was something lacking in him; something deep, something *real*; something that could

speaking of human impulse and sympathy, and which his lightness and recklessness—his selfish indifference and utter disregard of all laws, moral or divine—seemed to declare wanting.

But then his face. The charm of it, the beauty of it, the fascination of it, made all women blind and forgetful, and disarmed most men's criticism. Who could look on it and not pardon errors that it was in the very nature of such fascination to provoke? When men courted him and women threw themselves, almost unasked, at his feet, what was to be expected? She was quite woman of the world enough to know that men are more easily tempted and less to be blamed for yielding to temptations, than women are. But yet—it is not always easy to excuse them once one loves. That little word makes all the difference.

It would not have caused Lady Doris a pang of uneasiness or regret if her cousin Errol had flirted with Hilda St. Maur from one month's end to another. Errol loved her yet, and had loved her very dearly and deeply since his boyhood, but then she did not want his love, or return it in any way but that of purely cousinly regard, and Jack Trevanion——

She drew her breath short there, and checked the current of thought which seemed inclined to get headstrong and run away into dangerous channels. She had been too well tutored by the world, and assisted by the natural pride and coldness of her own temperament, to betray to either the man or woman who were torturing her that she felt one of the many stings they inflicted.

She knew that Mrs. St. Maur was considered very fascinating, and that she was also not more scrupulous than the generality of *mondines*. Yet it hurt her a little to see that show of interest and devotion, to watch the handsome head bend down towards the mischievous *riante* face of the woman she knew to be every way unworthy to be her rival. She was not sorry when her carriage was announced, and she could put an end to a scene both painful and distasteful to her sense of dignity and self-respect.

As her hand rested for a moment in that of Trevanion, he looked at her with something of shame and contrition

in his eyes. "Forgive me," they seemed to say, and with a sudden glad revulsion of feeling, she let her own speak back, even more frankly and eloquently than she was aware of. "I forgive," they said, and to Jack Trevanion it suddenly seemed as if all the world grew radiant, and life glad and purposeful, and the clouds of shame and sorrow rolled away as a scroll that is folded and done with.

So irrational a thing is Love !

CHAPTER IV.

A CURIOUS EXPERIMENT.

It was drawing near to sunset when Trevanion drove up to the old Hall, which, as he had said, was the only home he had ever known.

His birth had always seemed shrouded in mystery. His uncle would tell him nothing, save that his parents were dead. Not that he possessed any of those romantic or sentimental feelings usually supposed to belong to orphans. His boyhood had been lonely and companionless ; his youth wild, reckless and scored by adventures. His manhood, for he was now in his twenty-ninth year, marked and seared by the hot blast of an irrational and devouring passion.

Only too well he knew that he was no fitting match, either by birth, fortune, or deserts, for the Lady Doris Marchmont. But where yet is the man or woman who could be deterred from loving by the fact that such love was both hopeless and irrational ?

He had not been far wrong when he told the fair, proud woman that she had made a devil of him. Truly, if recklessness of life and limb, deeds of daring that set caution and death alike at defiance—fitful passions that had spared no woman, so only they might for one hour banish the torturing memory of *one*—pursuits unholy enough for fiends, into which he had plunged for their mental exhilara-

tion, if these and such as these deeds did not deserve the name he himself gave them, it would be difficult to say what did.

And now, as the stormy sunset broke the dark horizon line, and shimmered under heavy clouds over the stormy sea, he stood under the porch of his boyhood's home, and looked at it with a sudden overmastering sense of sorrow and despair.

The old Hall stood on an eminence that commanded a full view of the wild ocean, rolling in unbroken swell to dash itself in senseless rage against the iron-bound coast. Its ceaseless roar filled the air as with an echo of undying thunder. The piled-up billows rolled inland after every storm as if bent on destroying the sharp reefs and rocks that only broke their force into the harmless powder of perpetual spray.

Altogether, even in summer-time, it was a bleak and dreary spot. It looked dreary now, under the crimson glow of the angry sun, and the noise of the rising wind came keen and sharp to Jack Trevanion's ears as he paused there in the grey stone weather-beaten porch, ere entering the house that for seven years had not received him as guest or inmate.

Keenly alive to all physical sensations, and easily touched to pleasure or despondency, Trevanion was conscious of a certain chilling reluctant thrill that seemed to run through every vein, and arrest his steps even as they sought the threshold.

The door was only on the latch ; it yielded at once to his touch, and he entered the dark and gloomy hall.

Throwing down his overcoat and hat, and the small valise which was all his baggage, he took his way across the hall, and stopped at a door on the left-hand side, from under which came a faint stream of light.

He knocked at the door, and it instantly opened.

He stepped into the room and confronted its two occupants. Both were men. One was very old, and feeble of frame, cowering over a small peat fire ; the other was a man of lofty stature and pure Oriental type. His eyes, dark and gleaming as jewels, fastened themselves on

the face of the intruder, and a strange look of relief leaped into their bright and glittering depths.

Neither of the two men offered any formal greeting, but as Trevanion stood there, it suddenly seemed to him that all the room grew dark, that an overpowering sense of weakness and faintness stole over him, numbing every muscle, chilling the blood in his veins, deadening the beat of heart and pulse. Feebly, gropingly, as a blind man might have done, he stretched out his hands, and then a thick black darkness, dense and vaporous, seemed to overwhelm his senses—he was only conscious of utter silence, stillness, cessation.

As he staggered forward the Oriental caught him, and laid him on a low, broad divan before the smouldering fire.

“Not a moment too soon,” he said, peering anxiously into the white face that now looked curiously aged and shrunk.

“Quick, Hartman—the phial. Do you hear?”

The old man rose and tottered forward. He, too, peered into that altered face with a curious intentness—more of the curiosity that a man would have given to some strange and unperfected experiment, than that natural interest or regard displayed by human life to human life.

“Do you not hear, man?” said the Oriental impatiently. “What use to gaze at him? You have seen him like this before! Quick, I tell you, or it will be too late!”

Then the old man moved away to the further end of the vast dim chamber, and presently returned with a small phial, containing a clear and colourless liquid.

It sparkled and flashed like a diamond as the light caught it, and gently, drop by drop, the Oriental poured it down the throat of the unconscious man. The muscles relaxed, the heart began to pulsate, the hue of life came back to face and lips; he opened his eyes and looked up at the dark inscrutable face bent over his own.

“Is it you, Mandhar Ram?” he said dreamily.

Then he turned, his eyes closed, his breathing grew soft and regular as that of a sleeping child, and even as a child

might have done, he sighed faintly and drowsily, and fell into a deep and profound sleep.

* * * * *

It was a strange chamber in which Trevanion awakened some two hours later. A long, low room, filled with curious machinery, and around whose walls were ranged numerous specimens of the savage world. Strange and hideous animals, rows of gigantic birds and curious reptiles, snakes, monkeys, insects—the pride and labour of a naturalist's collection—all had their place here. The room was lit by a large globe of thick glass, suspended from the ceiling, which contained the bright effulgent light of electricity. The soft, moon-like rays fell on the two strange and intent faces, and on the bright and excited eyes of the younger man as he sat up on the divan and gazed enquiringly from one to the other.

“Have I been asleep?” he asked, and rubbed his eyes in a bewildered, doubtful way, gazing at the grisly vista of a dumb and dead creation, and from thence to the remembered chaos of retorts, and engines, and machinery, the chemical appliances, microscopes, crucibles, electric batteries—all the paraphernalia of physical science, which for many years he had neither cared nor thought of pursuing. It had engrossed him deeply once, but a life of excitement and pleasure had superseded that old allurements, and he had discovered that animate matter possessed greater charms than inanimate.

“Yes,” said the deep musical voice of the Oriental, “you have been asleep. You arrived here spent—exhausted. Sleep has restored you, has it not?”

“I feel well enough,” he said, rising from the couch and approaching the old man, who had resumed his seat by the fire. “How are you, uncle Hartman?” he continued, and laid his warm young hand on the shrivelled, withered claws that were trembling before the dull glow in the grate, in a vain effort to extract some warmth therefrom.

“I am well enough, my boy,” said the old man. “Well enough, but age is beginning to tell upon me, you see. The spirit is young and strong, but the frame—ah, the frame—that wears out. Yes, Jack, that wears out.”

"And you, Mandhar Ram—how are you?" said Trevanion lightly. "Your frame, at least, doesn't look like wearing out. You seem not a day older than when I parted from you, and that is—let me see—five—six——"

"Seven years ago," said that deep, thrilling voice. "A short space measured by achievements. I daresay it has been long enough to you."

"Yes," said the young man, somewhat wearily. "When Time has no resource save to be shortened, poisoned, killed, it contrives to drag along at a pretty slow rate."

He glanced round the room somewhat curiously.

"Any new discoveries?" he asked. "The philosopher's stone—the alchemist's secret—the elixor *vitæ*—eh?"

"Science has depths which one brief life of individual research can never reach," said Mandhar Ram gravely. "Again and again and again must we go to that well, only to find depths still deeper—mysteries more profound."

"You still believe in the paramount importance of electric force, I suppose?"

"As much as I believe that I exist," said the Oriental gravely. "There is not an atom in nature but contains that force, either in a latent or potential degree. It is the source and secret of life, in whatever form it manifests itself. Heat, light, magnetism, attraction, gravitation, are all the products of electrical energy—call it 'force' or 'generative power,' as you please, or as modern science decrees."

"You say the *source* and secret of life," observed the young man gravely. "Granting you have discovered *that*, what hinders you from creating life, in some shape, yourself?"

"Ah—what?" said the Oriental grimly. "Truly not the will or the power, since I have wrested the secrets of both from their prison-house of mystery."

The old man lifted his head and looked searchingly from one face to the other.

"Why did you ask that question?" he said suddenly.

Trevanion shrugged his shoulders.

"Why? pooh! How can I tell? Why does one ask anything; why does one think, act, move, love, hate? Tell

me that, you two who are so wise. I would prefer to know the cause of an action, rather than suffer its results."

"Doubtless," said Mandhar Ram gravely. "But with your nature, the knowledge of the cause or effect of any action would not deter you from its performance."

"How can you tell?" demanded Trevanion haughtily. "Do you know me so well that you answer for me better than I could for myself?"

"Who *should* know you if I do not?" said the Oriental, with a strange, mysterious smile. "Have I not foretold your actions again and again? Have I not warned you—counselled you, aided you? Is there a deed of your life unknown to me—a thought of your heart that I cannot fathom. We two stand almost as creator and created might stand. I have given you permission to test my powers often enough. Tell me, have I ever erred in stating what I know of you?"

"No! I give you the credit of correct prophecies," said Trevanion, with a sneer. "Not that I believed them at the time. But now I will put you to the test, if you wish. Tell me why I came here to-night."

"Because you are impelled to do so by a force that you could not control, and a fear that you could not explain."

"Right. But will you explain them for me?"

"No; the time is not yet ripe," said the Oriental, fixing his strange eyes on the handsome, excited face before him. "Neither your brain, nor your physical strength, could bear the shock of such a revelation. I will only give you one clue, follow, or leave it, as you wish. How often in your life has that feeling overpowered you—the feeling that brought you from the wilds of Southern Africa to your old and half-forgotten home to-night?"

"How often?" echoed the young man dreamily. "Let me think. The first time I was a young child. Yes, I recollect. There was a storm, a ship going to pieces on the reefs below. I ran almost in terror to you. The same sensation overtook me as I reached this room—faintness, darkness, a long, deep, dreamless sleep, the awaking to fresh vigour, to new life."

"Right! Now the second occasion."

"It was—why, it must have been seven years later—I was a boy of fourteen, a schoolboy, the ringleader of a riot. Again, in the midst of the turmoil and fighting that feeling mastered me."

"The third time," continued Mandhar Ram, "you were a young man, in the midst of the gay scenes and reckless enjoyments of a great city. You were then twenty-one. To-day is your twenty-eighth birthday, and from a still greater distance, from perils far greater, from attractions infinitely more powerful, you have sought me once again."

"At the end of every seven years—the mystic number—the fatal number," muttered the feeble, croaking voice of the old man. "Ask not the why and the wherefore. Be content with life, such life as yours—free, untrammelled, exhilarating, joyous; keenly alive to every sensation and emotion that thrills the heart and stirs the wild, hot pulse of youth. Enjoy—and live. It is a great gift—a great gift. But, as you value that gift, ask not its source, question not its origin. As the flower to the sun, as the blossom to the tree, as the insect to its hour of sunlight, the bird to its summer-time of song, so are you to the years of Time and the summer of Life. That alone can be joyous to youth! Ask not, but receive and enjoy, and be thankful. The day you repent the gift, the day you question of its source and meaning, the day that the fierceness of human passions maddens you to rebellion, or spurs you to crime, that day you and life must speak an eternal farewell. Now go; we would be alone. Ask no more. Seek your own room, and dream again on your boyish couch of the gifts of Youth and Hope and Love. For only to dreamers are they possible, and only as dreams do they ever visit human hearts."

CHAPTER V.

“I DEFY !”

“ONLY as dreams do they ever visit human hearts.” Those words echoed again and again through Jack Trevanion’s brain as he sat alone in his chamber and gazed into the clear and glowing flames.

Was it so—really? Were the best things of life but dreams, myths, alike impossible and beautiful and divine, that were never destined for mortal attainment.

It had never been his habit to think deeply. Indeed, his nature was too light, too sensuous, and too reckless for his actions to be guided by reason or self-control. Study had never been an effort to him when his youth had demanded mental application. He mastered most branches of knowledge with an ease and quickness that almost amounted to genius. Science had once possessed a strong fascination for him but a year of the laboratory and a course of metaphysics, and the incalculable labour and fatigue entailed upon him by the abstruse and perplexing studies on which Mandhar Ram insisted, soon dulled his energy and ardour.

Religion again had come in for a share of his attention, but his studies there were abruptly terminated as soon as he discovered that under whatever form or guise it appeared, it merely professed to teach individual devotees the way and the means of attaining an ideal state of bliss that defied rational description, and could in no way be pronounced certain or satisfactory. Religion, as a creed, or belief, or dogma taught of man, yet divorced itself from science and clung fondly and foolishly to the dry bones of superstition, to the blinding decrees of bigotry, or to a so-called Inspira-

tion which could not be reconciled even to the most charitable historical accuracy.

He turned to philosophy and to that higher science which seemed to him religious in the truest sense, because it did not stop short at the gates of nature, or the attempt to reconcile known and unknown forces. Who is there—scientist, atheist, materialist, call him what you will—who does not in his secret heart acknowledge that there is a *something* indescribable and inexplicable which underlies all the phenomena of nature, and rises in baffling and bewildering superiority to all the futile efforts at explanation, and all the feeble attempts which humanity makes at propitiation or worship!

Youth is generally as intolerant as it is enthusiastic. Jack Trevanion ended his studies and pursuits by believing very little, and only convinced that it lay with every man to seek for himself the *knowledge of himself*, the real aim and purpose of that brief span of existence designated Life. As years flew by the physical and sensuous element in his nature began to dominate the purer and more cultured. He loved existence for the sheer exhilarating delight of living and enjoying life; the excitement of danger, the intoxication of the senses, the brief triumphs that his many talents permitted him to taste, the conquests both ignoble and unsatisfying that fed his vanity.

But now, to-night, he sat alone in the midnight solitude of his boyhood's chamber, and reviewed one by one the memories and achievements and ambitions of the years he had known. Nothing, after all, had satisfied him. Nothing, now that he looked back and down the vista of the past, seemed really worth the labour of thought, or the fatigue of body, or that madness of the senses, mis-called pleasure—nothing—nothing. And again those words rang in his ears:

"Dream of the gifts of Youth and Hope and Love, for only as dreams do they ever visit human hearts."

"After all," he thought bitterly, "I am only a sham and a cheat, even to myself. I don't seem *real*. No feeling lasts, no emotion is genuine, no pursuit interests, and neither love nor friendship contents me. I have sought out knowledge, and it has served me here and there as a display of

power, or an advertisement of mental organisation, but none know better than myself how shallow and superficial it is. I have dipped into every tributary stream that runs into the broad deep ocean of Life. I have tasted its excitements, its pleasures, its temptations, its pains, its weariness and vanity and unrest—and for what? To succumb to the common fate of my human brotherhood. To live and crave and desire in all the wide world only one woman's love. To feel all other things of life and sense, and right and wrong, might perish everlastingly, so only once I held her to my heart, and knew that, throb for throb, and thought for thought, and passion for passion, her own gave back my answer! . . . Oh, fools! fools! we who think ourselves wise, and find our paradise centred but in another life we seek to make our own! And yet—to touch those proud sweet lips, to hear that heart, at once so strong and pure, pulse swiftly back to every throb of mine . . . Ah! that were bliss to dream of, and to die for, counting not the cost.”

He sighed heavily, and the sigh seemed echoed by another in the shadowy depths of the chamber. He lifted his head and looked round. Nothing ever startled him here; he had been too well used to strange sights and sounds in the days when the old Hall had been the sole boundary of his world. In the distance of the dimly lit room, it seemed to him that a form, shadowy and indistinct, yet presenting familiar outlines, was standing and contemplating him. “Is that you, Mandhar Ram?” he said indifferently. “Why don't you come over to the fire and be sociable?”

The figure seemed to gather shape and substance in its wavering lines, and the deep and luminous eyes of the Oriental looked gravely, searchingly, back to his own.

“I have come,” he said, “to warn you as I warned you before. Love is fatal to you, the love of the woman you desire will come but as the gift of Death. Think of her no more if still you would live and enjoy life. The world is wide, your gifts are manifold, you may seek, pursue, enjoy where you will, but fate bars you from this one other human soul. I say not she would never love you. She

might—nay she does, in a way, but it is only the physical attraction of the senses that sways her and draws her to you. All that is pure and noble, and feminine and divine in her nature, escapes you, and always would."

"Can you tell me why?"

His voice was harsh and discordant. The truths he heard were too exact an echo of his own knowledge of himself to seem anything but truth. Just as a natural mirror showed him his natural face, so had this strange being always had the power of reading his inner nature and holding it up before his mental vision as clearly as the glass reflected his physical form.

It did not surprise him that every page of his life, and every feeling of his heart, was read like an open book. He had always known that Mandhar Ram possessed this power, and he had never resented it because it seemed useless and irrational to do so. "What is—*is*; what will be—will be," he had always said to himself in his boyhood's days.

He said it now with a bitter resignation to the inevitable, which indeed was the light in which Mandhar Ram stood to him. Never a prophecy but had been fulfilled—never a warning that had not been justified; but that made him all the more bitter and hopeless now, as he sat silently there, doing stubborn battle against desires he knew were selfish, and passions that were ignoble.

"If she loves me," he said at last, "why should I not win her? I do not say I am worthy; no man would be worthy of her. She is the very crown and perfection of ideal womanhood. But when one loves, one forgives imperfections, faults, weakness, and she would help me to rise to better things."

"No," said Mandhar Ram, sternly, "there you err; she could not help you; neither man nor woman could. You know that yourself. Search your own heart, remember the past, remember also that by very reason of the love you bear this woman you will be capable of doing her the greatest wrong you have yet inflicted on your kind. Shun her, avoid her, strive not to win her love. So much alone I may say. If a day ever comes when that warning, now disregarded, demands the vengeance of the Fate you defy,

my lips will be unsealed and I may speak its reason. But neither hour nor time is yet ripe. I may but utter it. With you it rests to accept or defy."

Then the young man sprang to his feet, his eyes aflame, his cheeks flushed; the very madness and recklessness of an undisciplined and headstrong nature speaking out in the set lips, and the passionate fire of his glance.

"I care not," he said. "All other things of life you bade me taste and enjoy till I proved their cost and found them bitter and unsatisfying. This—this alone, the one pure draught my thirsting lips desire, you would deny me; your warning comes too late. *I love her*. I who have never loved man or woman yet. If every fiend of Hell stood up before me now to utter the warning you have uttered it would not deter me. Is life so sweet that I should fear Death? Nay, rather would I welcome it, so that it come as my lady's bridal gift. Take back your warning, Mandhar Ram; I heed it not, nor do I care for the evils it threatens."

"You will not accept?"

"No—a thousand times no! *I defy*."

There was no answer. Faintly as a shadow melts and is dissolved, silent as descent of darkness from the arms of night, so faintly and silently the figure seemed to fade back into the gloom from out of which it had arisen, and once more Trevanion was alone.

CHAPTER VI.

“HE LOVED ME—ONCE.”

“WELL!” said Mrs. St. Maur, dropping the Society paper she held, with an emotion of genuine astonishment. “Well! . . . of all the wild, erratic beings, commend me to Jack! What will he do next?”

It was her “day,” and she sat in the smallest and cosiest of her suite of rooms in company with Lady Doris and Colonel Herbert, who had lingered after her other visitors.

“Jack—who?” asked Colonel Herbert laughingly. He did not particularly affect Mrs. St. Maur, for he was fastidious in his tastes, and she jarred terribly upon him, as, indeed, did a great many other society women.

“Jack who? Why, Jack Trevanion, of course!” exclaimed Hilda St. Maur, excitedly. “My Jack—my ‘Knave of Hearts,’ as I call him. Fancy, he’s broken the bank at Monte Carlo! What do you think of that?”

“Luck!” said Colonel Herbert sententiously. “Most vagabonds and adventurers have it, you know.”

Lady Doris said nothing, only her face seemed to grow warm, and she half raised the screen of feathers in her hand as if to shut out the glow of lamp-light.

“Why do you call him that?” said Mrs. St. Maur. “He comes of a good old Cornish family. Tre—Pol—and—Pen, you know, are all great at pedigree, but even if he were of the ‘dust of yesterday,’ what could it matter, with such gifts and such a face as his?”

“Very little, I suppose, to a woman,” said Colonel Herbert bitterly. “The outside of the ‘cup and platter,’ is all they ever care for.”

Mrs. St. Maur laughed—her airy, careless laugh. “You

men are all jealous of him," she said. "Not that I wonder at it. What an army of irate husbands and furious lovers he left behind when he went off to South Africa. And now, I suppose he will be more than ever irresistible, if he has won a fortune to back his other attractions."

"Oh! that sort of fortune soon goes," said Colonel Herbert coldly. "Probably it will only serve to pay his debts."

"I wish I could break a bank to pay mine," laughed Mrs. St. Maur. "How silent you are, Doris. Doesn't the news interest you? But, oh, I forgot, you never did like Jack."

"I think a man might do better things than gamble," said Lady Doris quietly. "It is a senseless waste of time—of mind—of money."

"Even if one wins a fortune?"

"The chance of fortune does not redeem the action, or purify the motive."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Hilda St. Maur petulantly, "you really are too good and too severe for us all. You would make life a sort of 'Court of Lyonesse,' if you could, but believe me, it is much more amusing as a comedy of Sardous. It is a mistake to take anything seriously."

"A mistake you are not likely to make, Hilda."

"Certainly not. I am too wise and too fond of enjoyment."

"Oh!" said Lady Doris contemptuously. "If you call it enjoyment——"

"Well, so it is to me. Only one never has enough money. If I were as rich as you, Doris, I would be off to Monte Carlo like a shot."

"In July—?" asked Colonel Herbert, raising his brows in surprise.

"Oh, what does that matter? One place is as hot as another, and there's always excitement there."

"And danger," said the Colonel.

"So much the better. I hate monotony. Give me a life of perpetual change, movement, excitement. No two weeks of life should resemble each other."

"They do not really, or in detail," said Lady Doris. "We only think they do."

"I wonder if he will come back to town, now," said Mrs. St. Maur, glancing at the paper beside her by way of explaining the vagueness of that personal pronoun. "I thought he was still in Cornwall. But one might just as well try to focus the movements of a comet as those of Jack Trevanion."

"No doubt he would come if he knew you wished it," said Lady Doris with indifference.

She rose now, and laid aside the fan of feathers that she had held in her hand. The glass showed her her own reflection, pale, calm, self-possessed as ever.

"How white you look!" said Hilda St. Maur. "Are you tired or unwell?"

"No," said Lady Doris calmly. "It is only the heat, and you have so much heliotrope in the room, Hilda. The scent always makes me feel faint."

"I thought it was your favourite flower two seasons ago," said Mrs. St. Maur, with a little malicious smile.

The beautiful woman looked calmly down at her as if seeking to fathom the meaning of the careless words. "Indeed?" she said, with a slight gesture of indifference. "Oh, my dear, *two* seasons ago—how can I possibly remember what was my favourite flower then?"

"It certainly is a long time for a woman's memory to be constant to anything," remarked Colonel Herbert. "You will allow me to see you to your carriage, Lady Doris?"

She bowed and then permitted herself to be kissed by her friend, and walked with her usual stately grace through the medley of "art decorations," and Liberty furniture of the suite of rooms that were the pride and joy of Hilda St. Maur's heart.

"You never come to see me," she said to Colonel Herbert, as she gave him her hand while the footman held open her carriage door. "I know you are steeped in engagements, but can you not spare half-an-hour occasionally for an old friend?"

He murmured something apologetically about soon remedying his error, that he thought she did not receive or care for visitors—Errol had said so.

"Oh! was it Errol's fault?" she said, and smiled. "Well, show him he is wrong. Come and lunch with me to-morrow at two. I am leaving town very shortly. I think of going to Cornwall again."

"I shall be delighted," he said, with a glance that showed the words were not the idle utterance of conventional Society.

"My cousin is coming also," she said, "and the Baroness Güldenstern. You know her, I think."

"Very slightly," he said. "She is a deeply interesting person, is she not?"

"Judge for yourself," said Lady Doris. "At all events she is clever, and five minutes' conversation with her is worth days and weeks of the idle fripperies that we hear from most women's lips."

Then the door was closed, the carriage dashed off, and Colonel Herbert took his way thoughtfully homewards in the dusky warmth of the summer evening, his thoughts full of the woman he had just left—the woman he had shrined and worshipped in his heart for more years than he cared to remember.

It had been always hopeless, he told himself it always would be hopeless, but that did not prevent his thinking of her and worshipping her still. "She will never care for any man," he thought sadly, as he walked along under the trees in the almost deserted Park. "She is not the type of woman to commit the feminine folly of 'falling in love.' She dreams too much, and her standard is high—too high for the men of her time, and her day, I often think. And yet how much better and nobler women might make us if they chose."

He sighed a little, and lit a cigar, and looked away to where the red light of the sunset burned over the million roofs of the great City.

It seemed to him as if a sudden sickness and weariness overtook him—a sickness of heart, a weariness of the senses for the wasted days and hours that make up the sum total of most men's lives. The beautiful pale face of the woman he had left seemed a representation of purer ideals and loftier ambitions than any he had sought or set before him.

By nature he was frank and loyal, and of simple tastes and studious habits, but the groove of his life had not been one that could allow of such tastes and habits to be pursued. True, he was not vicious or extravagant, he had never been false to a woman, or lied to a man, yet now, in the sudden weakness of this moment, in that curious *in-reaching* which is the effect of introspection, his sins seemed black and manifold, and a sense of remorse and shame shook the foundations of a peace that had always been more or less self-deceptive.

To most men, whatever their nature or mode of life, there comes an hour of awaking such as this. An hour when their own impotence, and uselessness and imperfections seem suddenly arraigned as before a mental judgment-seat. The Past flashes back in condemnatory colours, the Present looks hopeless, the Future blank. For just that space, be it a moment—an hour—a day—they stand alone in a complete and ostracised solitude which no other power can invade. In that space, be it long or short, the man is confronted by his *real* self. That imperious, masterful, incomprehensible *Ego* from which there is no escape.

Let no one think such an hour is without a reason, even as it cannot be *without an effect*.

But the wise alone seek to know its wherefore, and to profit by its teaching. The fools, the careless, the scoffing, but rush into deeper depths of vice and wilder excesses of pleasure, so that by any means they may escape the dreaded memory of a Fate suddenly revealed, a glimpse into the dread Beyond, where the ghosts of their dead selves and their evil deeds, shall confront them with untiring accusations.

If Colonel Herbert's thoughts were of a disturbing character, those of Lady Doris Marchmont were equally troubled; she could no longer deceive herself into thinking that Jack Trevanion's actions were indifferent to her. Long as she had schooled herself to coldness and indifference to men, she knew in her heart of hearts that where this one man was concerned, emotion had conquered reason, and her slumbering senses had awakened to a passionate pain. And yet what was there in his warped, useless and untrue

manhood to stir her feelings, awaken her sympathies, claim her pity or indulgence?

She had heard his name linked to that of scores of women, she had known for herself that he respected few ties of morality, she could not call to mind a single noble or unselfish action of which he was the hero. True he was bold to recklessness, brave as a lion, fearless as an Indian warrior, but these were purely physical virtues, if indeed they deserved to be called virtues at all. They showed no strength of character, no nobility of mind—nothing that might in any way serve even the blindness of love as an excuse for idealizing the object of that love.

And now, almost in the hour of meeting her again, he had started off to that gambling hell of Monte Carlo, to win the paltry triumph that awaits the hero of a successful *coup*.

A thrill of disgust chilled, and yet moved her, in a vague regretful way. She could not account for it. She knew that in any other man she would have scorned such an action; it was a folly as well as a personal offence. But she could not arraign this one man even before the bar of her wounded pride, or condemn him as she felt he ought to be condemned.

"He might do better things, he could do better things," she thought to herself, while her fleet horses bore her swiftly along to her beautiful and luxurious home—the home that was so desolate and so lonely, where her presence or absence made no living thing the gladder, or the sorrier. She looked at it all to-night with something of sadness and regret in her proud calm eyes.

It was in her power to give it to any man she chose, but then with the gift must go—herself. And as she thought of that her heart throbbed almost with pain. For something seemed to speak with clear and subtle warning of a desire that could not be gratified, a longing that if realized would still fail to content.

"Even—if I loved him," she thought, "what could it mean for us? . . . We should never be happy, I feel it—we are so totally unsuited—and yet—and yet——"

Her face grew warm. Her heart thrilled to the memory of words she had forbidden, of looks that had spoken more

eloquently than any speech. He had loved her once and she had banished him. Would he ever return, would he ever utter again those words whose passionate rashness she had rebuked with scorn, though all the time they had seemed to her the sweetest her ears had ever heard?

She sighed, and passed on to her boudoir, and had herself dressed in a soft flowing tea-gown of white silk and crêpe, her usual dress when alone. How lovely she was, but no one was there to see her.

"I am tired of town," she said to herself later on that night, when neither books, nor work, nor music, had been able to calm her restlessness. "I will go down to Cornwall the day after to-morrow. It is lonely there, but at least there is the sea in its changeful moods, and all places are lonely now."

CHAPTER VII.

"IF A WOMAN WILLS——"

COLONEL HERBERT came to the luncheon party next day, his usual gay and courteous self. Errol had not yet arrived, and he joined Lady Doris and her friend the Baroness in the small drawing-room overlooking the Park.

The Baroness Güldenstern was a woman of whom one's first impression was "How very ugly," yet with whom no man or woman could talk for five minutes, without acknowledging that she was absolutely charming.

She was a tall, finely-formed woman on a large scale, with a massive head and throat, and a quantity of rough fair hair somewhat untidily arranged. Her complexion was sallow, and her features irregular, but when she began to talk, and her eyes flashed, and her face grew animated, no one ever thought of her want of beauty. Her personality was so strong and so energetic that it swept away all criticism as a current sweeps a straw. She greeted Colonel Herbert with cordiality. They had met once or twice, and were mutually pleased with each other.

"We were discussing infant prodigies and their effect," she said smiling, and making room for him on the wide cushioned ottoman where she was seated. "I tell Lady Doris that we have had the baby actor, the baby musician, the baby reciter—(oh! who can express the boredom of that species?)—and the baby masher. We only need a baby novelist and a baby bishop to complete the list!"

Colonel Herbert laughed. "Doubtless," he said, "they too will come. The demand always brings the supply. Do you remember, a few years ago no one ever heard a lady play the violin in public? Now there is never a concert without one performing more or less badly on that desecrated instrument."

"Why do you call it desecrated?" asked Lady Doris.

"Because so few performers give it right or reverent usage," he answered. "The violin is the one instrument capable of interpreting the divinest and most perfect form of melody that the word 'music' conveys to us. If the player has a soul it speaks out that soul—all that is highest, holiest, purest, most divine in nature or in art, it can interpret; but he on his side must treat it as an interpreter, not a machine; a thing of life and feeling, not a mere vehicle for the clap-trap and showy fireworks that one generally hears, and to which a gaping crowd listen and cry 'How wonderful!'"

"You are right," said the Baroness, who was herself a very musical person, and who understood and loved art for its own sake. "But unfortunately while we have an uneducated public and starving artists, clap-trap will carry the day. The artist knows it is ignoble—feeling and sentiment cry out against it—but what will you? He must live, so genius is desecrated at the shrine of necessity."

"I do not think," said Lady Doris, "that there is much musical genius in our day. Talent, perhaps; but genius—no."

"We have had Wagner," said the Baroness. "He had faults, I grant, but he possessed real genius."

"I thought," said Colonel Herbert, "that genius was the power not only of understanding and interpreting, but

of making its laws understood. Wagner can hardly be said to do that. His music has always raised a storm of controversy ; it is grand, but there is also in it something monstrous, *bizarre*, unsatisfactory. It seldom satisfies the sense of musical fitness, and even becomes tiresome because of the inordinate length to which phrases and melodies are drawn out."

"Melodies and Wagner!" chimed in the voice of Errol, who had entered during the discussion. "Merciful Heavens! what a combination! Did he not scorn melody with all his heart and soul? Whenever I have listened to one of his operas, and heard a melodious phrase or anything that seemed to me 'musical,' I have always been struck with the rapidity with which he runs away from it, as if absolutely ashamed that it should have surprised him into giving it expression. Passion, storm, warfare, controversy, these, I grant, he can interpret, and that with a force that stuns and bewilders the listener. But it is not music, and it does not please, and I don't believe it will ever be popular."

"Not in England, perhaps," said the Baroness, somewhat scornfully—"not to a nation who persist in forcing their greatest singers to keep on, on, to the end of their days with the school-room rubbish of so-called 'popular ballads'—a nation who can patiently listen for a quarter of a century to 'Tom Bowling,' and 'Home, Sweet Home!' and still *encore* them!"

"I daresay," said Lady Doris, smiling, "it seems very strange to foreigners to go to any of our representative 'people's concerts,' and listen to the stuff the singers sing. But, you see, the choice of songs is not given to the vocalists, but to the publishers. Whatever of real art or real feeling there might be in an artist, that hateful royalty system would destroy. Composers and singers are alike at the mercy of trade, and if they don't accept its conditions they must starve. Now, genius should never be hampered with conditions, or worried about money matters, but unfortunately genius is almost always born to poverty and struggles and hardships. To live at all for that which it desires to live, nothing remains but to accept such terms

A VAGABOND LOVER.

as may best preserve life. But it is as though we tied a stone to the wing of a bird, and then bade it fly."

"Poor Genius!" sighed Colonel Herbert. "How much it has suffered in its earthly pilgrimages! I suppose it has grown weary of them at last, since it so rarely visits us now."

"Perhaps," said the Baroness, thoughtfully, "it is more widely diffused than you imagine. There is a far greater amount of capability and talent in the world of our day than there was a century, or half a century, ago. Consequently genius must shine with a very brilliant light indeed to be distinguished from the host of other constellations. It is absolutely necessary now to possess knowledge, and therefore the race has set itself to acquire it. Formerly learning was the privilege of the few, and then a matter of extreme difficulty; now it is universal. From the lowest to the highest, there seems an instinctive effort to grasp at knowledge. Science and art, of course, are included in the term."

"How do you explain the fact?" asked Lady Doris.

"I should say it was simply the outcome of the universal law of evolution—an effort on the part of human units to reach out into a wider and fuller consciousness. Man's faculties are not yet fully developed—those faculties which might permit of his grasping his own environments, or comprehending what really is his own self-consciousness; the real 'I,' which is something far more important than our physical structure, with a combination of nerves, and functions, and sensations."

"Yet, has not science proved those nerves and functions to be the seat of the intellect, the reason, and the soul?" said Colonel Herbert.

She laughed slightly. "Oh!" she said, "if you talk of science, you descend to a purely material view of the problem of life. Science does not recognise such a term as 'Spirit,' or separate *consciousness* from the physical body. Yet it alone is *real* to those who have studied and thought out the question in all its bearings. Matter, to use the favourite scientific term, is only a manifestation on one plane of nature, and, indeed, is the form and essence of

nature itself, as understood and comprehensible to the mere physical senses, needed for existence on that plane."

"You are going too deep for our poor brains," said Lady Doris, rising as luncheon was announced. "Remember, my dear Baroness, that the butterflies of fashion have neither the time nor the mind to think out such problems as these."

"More shame for them," said the Baroness, indignantly. "They will suffer for their folly, believe me."

"No doubt," said Colonel Herbert, offering his arm; "but do you think that telling them so, has a deterrent effect? I fancy not. The fools are in the majority, Baroness, as they have always been!"

Then they went in to luncheon, and the conversation drifted into more conventional channels. Errol devoted himself to his cousin with a pertinacity that Colonel Herbert had not before remarked, but it was a pertinacity born of "the time and the hour" that made his opportunity. Now that Jack Trevanion had returned again he felt less secure than ever. He had never seen Lady Doris manifest any interest in any man, but some sure instinct of jealousy and animosity told him that this one man, at all events, had power to move her calm composure and proud disdain into something more like natural and womanly feeling. If she had been like any other woman, he might have attributed the change to caprice, or that momentary interest or fascination which serves them as an excuse for showing favour to one man more than another; but Lady Doris was so different to most women that he never attempted to judge her by their standard.

He tried to get her to speak of Jack Trevanion, and was foolish enough to censure and abuse him for his gambling propensities and wild habits. Lady Doris listened quite unmoved.

"Are you so very perfect yourself, my dear Errol?" she said at last. "I fancy I have heard a different tale, both from my father and yours."

He coloured slightly. "Oh!" he said, "every fellow must sow his wild oats. I'm going to turn over a new leaf

now. Herbert's been lecturing me on my evil ways. He's an awfully good fellow."

"I agree with you there," said Lady Doris, letting her glance rest on the bronzed soldierly face that was turned in courteous attention towards the Baroness; "though I would rather sum up his attraction as that of one of the few *gentlemen* modern society and manners have left us."

"I hope," said Errol, lowering his voice and bending closer to her, "that you are not really going to bury yourself in that hateful old Cornish ruin again? Hilda is going to Carlsbad. Why don't you go with her?"

"I do not wish to," said his cousin, coldly. "I am tired of foreign health resorts, and I do not particularly wish for Hilda's companionship."

"But why not stop in town? Why do you wish to go to Cornwall?"

"May I ask why you set yourself to arraign my actions, or question my reasons?" said his cousin, proudly.

Errol coloured again in some confusion. "Oh! hang it all, Doris!" he said. "Surely as your cousin I may show some interest in what you do?"

"You may show as much as you please," she said, coldly; "but I object to being asked for explanations, and I certainly decline to give them. I am going to Cornwall, and I leave town to-morrow. The why and the wherefore only concerns myself."

* * * * *

"I'm afraid, Herbert, it's no go!" said Errol, some quarter of an hour later, as they sat smoking cigarettes together, after the ladies had left them.

"What's no go?" asked the Colonel, looking in surprise at the clouded brow and moody face of the young man.

"My success with Lady Doris. She won't have anything to say to me."

"Oh!" said Colonel Herbert, calmly, "I thought you told me the other day she wasn't your style, and that you had no views in that quarter?"

"I've always been fond of her," said the young man,

gloomily. "And it would be such a splendid thing for me!" he went on. "She's so jolly rich."

"Don't you think," said Colonel Herbert, "that it's rather—mean—to marry a woman for her money?"

"Mean? Why, good gracious, man! what's come over you? Isn't it done every day?"

"The fact of a thing being done every day, doesn't make it right to do it."

"Oh, hang it all, Herbert, don't you begin to preach," said the young man testily. "Of course it isn't as if it was only her money I cared for. I love her as much as I could ever love any woman. But I know what it is, it's all that vagabond adventurer, he's turned her head just as he's turned scores of other women's. D—n him."

"What makes you think she—she loves him?" asked Colonel Herbert. "I'm sure you are mistaken; she is so proud, so clever—so beautiful—the last woman on earth to throw herself away for sake of a handsome face, for after all that makes the sum and total of Trevanion's pretensions."

"And isn't it always the 'last woman on earth' we think capable of doing a mad thing, who always does it?" exclaimed Errol impatiently. "Those quiet, proud, self-contained women are just the most reckless when they *do* take the plunge. I tell you I'm certain she cares for Trevanion. I don't know why I should think so, but I do, and as she's free and rich and independent, why she can please herself, of course, and throw her wealth and her person into his arms, if the fancy takes her!"

"Hush," said Colonel Herbert sternly, "you must not speak of her like that. Your cousin is too pure and true a woman to be led by caprice, or swayed by a mere fancy."

"Oh—is she?" sneered Errol, who had now completely lost his temper. "You are a man of the world, Herbert, and ought to know something of women. Haven't you found that love is a magician against whom wisdom, friendship, prudence, counsel, all avail nothing. Look at the Countess of E——, marrying a penniless adventurer young enough to be her grandson! Look at old Lady Fitz-Patrick doing the same thing almost! Bah! it's no use

to talk, or argue. If a woman is bent on doing a thing she'll do it, and Lady Doris won't be an exception to her sex in that particular, whatever she may be in others."

Colonel Herbert said nothing; his face was grave, and almost sad. In his heart he was saying to himself with a fear that had never troubled him before, "Heaven keep her from such a fate!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WON!

THERE had been a storm, fierce and wild as most of the storms are that burst over the Cornish coast. The passion and the wrath of it were still throbbing in the pulses of the passionate sea, and the wind was fitful and stormy.

The whole coast line was fringed with white foam, and the waves as they broke on the rocks seemed to explode into volumes of dense white steam that rose in the air till they caught the light of the dying sun-rays and then splintered and shivered into flakes of vivid fire.

Lady Doris stood and watched the scene with that sense of awe and wonder which this wild and picturesque coast always inspired.

Her eyes were soft and dreamy, her face had caught a faint colour from the sweet keen air, and her hair was loose and rippled about her brow. Her gown of dark serge was simplicity itself, though deftest hands of fashionable milliners had cast its simple elegance together, and she looked more lovely, more womanly, and more approachable—so to speak—than when she played the great lady in the salons of society.

So intent was her gaze, so far away her thoughts, that she seemed unconscious of any other presence; but gradually a possessing sense of nearness and companionship made itself felt—a feeling that had once been all too painfully familiar, and she turned as if compelled to turn, and saw standing not half-a-dozen yards away, the figure of a man.

As their eyes met, a sense of embarrassment was visible on each face. The man bowed first and came forward, holding out his hand. "I thought I could not be mistaken," he said. "It *is* you—Lady Doris?"

She let him clasp her hand, but her colour changed and her self-command deserted her with the sudden shock and surprise of his presence.

Her thoughts seemed sweeping in a circle, like a bird unable to poise. She could not collect them, or frame them into the measure of conventional speech. "I—I thought you were at Monte Carlo," she stammered.

"I *was* at Monte Carlo; I returned last night," he said, looking at her with eyes more eloquent than most men's words, yet eyes that for once had grown humble of their power and less sure of their effect.

"Are you staying at Porhynna?" asked Trevanion presently.

"Yes, I came here about a week ago."

She was silent again, her face turned seawards, her eyes on the curling waves. Memory swept over her as the spray swept over the rocks and shingle below. Now keen almost to pain, now dark with horror and disgust, now faint with a joy of which she felt afraid—afraid because every woman knows that no man can be quite indifferent, or quite impersonal to her who has once held it in his power to give her such memories. Bury them deep as she may, their ghosts will start to life and confront her in after years by the mere spell of a word, a look, a scene, the scent of a flower, the strain of a once familiar melody.

These two had many memories between them, and they came crowding back fierce and swift here on those wild cliffs, with the breath of the summer air, and the faint salt spray of the sea. Conventionality seemed to fall off them as a useless and discarded garment. They were not like the two people who had fenced with each other in bitter and disdainful fashion, in Hilda St. Maur's drawing-room.

The silence grew awkward at last. Lady Doris broke it resolutely, but with effort. "I must be going home," she said. "It is a long way to Porhynna."

"Have you walked?" he asked in some surprise.

"Oh yes, I always walk here. I am fond of exercise."

"Are you alone at Porhynna?" he asked.

"No, I have a friend staying with me. The Baroness Gldenstern. Do you know her?"

"No," he said, and drew a breath of relief. He had feared she was about to say Mrs. St. Maur was her companion. "May I not see you home?" he urged as she held out her hand in farewell.

"It is so far, so much out of your way," she murmured confusedly.

"I think," he said, "you might guess how little I mind distance or exertion on your behalf. May I come?"

"If—if you wish."

He turned and walked beside her without another word.

"So you have heard I was at Monte Carlo?" he said presently.

"Yes and of your doings there. Now-a-days one's actions are pilloried for one, however much privacy is desired."

"Of course those d—d society gossips get a hold of everything. I—I beg your pardon," he added hurriedly, as he saw her hurt and offended look. "I'm afraid I've picked up all sorts of rough ways and habits in these two years."

"Was South Africa so very uncivilized?" she asked.

"Yes and no. I daresay it was my own fault. I chose the rough and unconventional side of life because I was so sick of the false and fashionable."

"Yet you returned to it."

"Not to 'it'; to something it held for me. I think I could not help myself. There are feelings that grow too strong for one; you must yield or grow mad. At least that is how they affect me. I have always had a dread of that sensation coming over me. It is fatal in its effects, or results."

"Do you not think it might be possible to conquer such a feeling before it grew—too strong?"

"No," he said doggedly. "I nearly died with the effort once, and it was useless after all. I have made up my mind I won't attempt it again."

"Do you mean to compel Fate to meet your wishes?"

He smiled. "Fate," he said, "to a man, generally means a woman. I cannot answer your question yet, Lady Doris; but rest assured that if I can compel my Fate to meet my wishes, I shall not spare myself either effort or trouble."

She shivered suddenly, though the summer air was still warm.

"Are you cold?" he asked, with quick concern. "You don't look strong. You should not stay out so late. The air is always chilly after sunset on this coast."

"Oh, I am quite strong," she said; "and I like wild weather, it braces one up, knocks off the cobwebs, I always say."

"I am glad we have one taste in common," he said. "I too love storm and wind. It has an electrical effect upon me. I remember as a child always fancying that it blew life into us—the fierceness and the power and the strength of it used to exhilarate me as no other sensation could do."

"You are rather fond of physical sensations, I imagine," she said.

"They make up the sum of life, do they not? There *are* moments on which one can look back, glad only to have lived to know them—hours which make all other hours pale and colourless in comparison."

"I have never known such hours," she said coldly. "But I think to enjoy in the way you describe, needs an enthusiastic, as well as a sensuous nature. It is merely physical pleasure born of a purely physical temperament."

"I wonder," he said suddenly, "if you are really as cold as you seem, Lady Doris?"

She flushed to the roots of her fair, ruffled hair. He caught her eyes in their sudden upward glance, and the flash and fire of his own seemed to burn down into her very soul, telling her the tale that years before they had told, and for which she had banished him from her presence.

"I would rather not discuss myself," she said hurriedly. "It cannot matter what I seem or am. Every person has a distinct individuality, of whose nature they alone are

conscious. To the outside world what is it but that we please or amuse, satisfy or offend? That is all it knows, or cares to know."

"Yes," he said slowly; "but I am not the 'outside world' to you, Lady Doris, and I want to know more than it does. I am hungry for your thoughts, your moods, your *real* self. Do you remember in the old days, when I was so—desperate, how once I said I would like to have your very soul my own, to know, and read, and possess. That is how I feel again—to-night. It is your spell, your witchcraft. The feeling rises with the rising wind. I don't think even you could master it now."

He took off his hat and shook back the thick, dusky hair, and the wind that lifted the curls from his brow, blew one soft, loosened tress of hers against his face. He caught it and kissed it passionately.

"Let us cease to act," he said. "You know I love you—you knew it long ago. Are you cold enough and unforgiving enough to send me from you a second time?"

He had paused beside her. The dusk had fallen rapidly, the wind swirled and sighed amidst the overhanging branches of the trees. In the gloom their eyes met, and the mastering spell of a passion, the like of which she had never conceived or believed possible, held Lady Doris dumb and yet terrified. She could not speak. She could not control her thoughts or herself. That one presence, with its masterful magnetism, thrilled her through and through. Despite her drooping lids, she could see those remembered eyes gazing back to hers with the old adoring, passionate gaze—filling her with feverish trouble, and strange and subtle fancies.

A lifetime of emotions seemed crowded into that moment of silence, and yet she was as far as ever from understanding whether she really loved him, or whether it was that strange power and influence of his which made her forget pride and coldness, and all the usual armour of her woman's dignity, and feel that for his sake she could unbend and acknowledge herself but a woman after all.

"Are you never going to speak?" he said suddenly. "Oh, my marble goddess, come down from your pedestal

for once. I love you—love you—*love* you ! Do you hear ?—do you care ? Oh ! you must—you must !”

He seized her hands in both of his, and held them against his heart so that she could feel its quick, hard throbs.

There was not a vestige of colour in his face ; for once in his life he was too wildly and passionately in earnest to master himself. He had not intended to say such words, but they had burst the bonds that so long had held them in his heart's silence, and he felt now as if his very life hung on her answer to his love.

“Speak !” he said, with a quick, nervous pressure of the hands he held. She felt the thrill of that strong clasp tingling like flame in her pulses. She lifted her heavy white lids and looked at him, and as she looked, the colour softly rose and spread from throat to cheek, and up to the fair, calm brow.

His face with its unusual pallor startled her. She met his eyes—eager, beseeching, passionate, and then—how or why she never knew—with a sudden, little, quick movement, her hands were drawn about his neck, the dark, curl-crowned head stooped to hers ; in an instant both lips touched, trembled, clung together, in a kiss that would make the memory of a lifetime.

“Oh !” he said, suddenly releasing her and gazing down, down into the depths of her eyes, as if, indeed, to read her very soul, “Oh ! you do love me—you *do* love me, Doris. I am not dreaming. It is really—*you*.”

She came close to him in the dusky gloom. Pride and coldness seemed to fall from her like a mantle that she needed no longer. “Yes, it is really me,” she said. “But I think we are both—mad. Do not you ?”

“Heaven grant the madness long continuance !” he said, in a sudden, breathless way, “if joy be madness.”

He drew her closer to his side, but she trembled greatly and struggled from his arms.

“No, no !” she said. “I am—afraid. I cannot bear it. Take me home now. I am not used to strong emotions !”

CHAPTER IX.

HER THOUGHTS.

IT was close upon midnight, and Lady Doris sat before the fire in her dressing-room, sleepless and feverish with vexed and bewildering thoughts.

Her face was very pale. The long, loosened coils of her hair hung in two strands to the hem of her white, fur bordered gown. Her eyes were dark and serious. Once a flush, hot and bright, as if born of some sweet shame, touched her cheeks and throat. She thought of that kiss as it had burned on her lips, and the memory brought back afresh the sensation.

Did she love him? Was this wild feeling in her veins, this pulsing memory, this unrest, this mingling of doubt and dread-- Love?

To the world she had always seemed a cold, proud woman, incapable of the softness and weakness which is almost inseparable from that subjugation and yielding of self, which a great passion inspires and demands. To the world--yes--but she knew herself as the world could never know her; she knew that it was in her to give grandly, generously, nobly, but so to give she must have full faith and trust in the recipient of her bounty. So to give she must

“ . . . Love infinitely
And be loved—”

It had always seemed to her that women let themselves be wooed too easily, and won too lightly. That they were carelessly regardless of their own power, and by setting too

small a value on themselves, gave men the right to depreciate them also.

How could men display chivalry to a set of beings who talked their slang, copied their manners, followed their pursuits, and were, in dress, voice, and habits, a compromise between the harlots they kept, and the social proprieties they obeyed? Women whose minds were empty of all culture, whose hearts were incapable of a pure and true emotion, who lived for Society, with its morbid and senseless exaggerations of pleasure, who had an elastic code of morals that condoned every sin so long as the sinner obeyed the 11th Commandment, who gossipped over each other's dresses and immoralities and passions in the same breath; to whom content seemed an unknown word, and shame an unexperienced sensation; who had no deep or earnest thought of life or its meaning, any more than they ever allowed to death and its inevitable vengeance; who regarded wifehood as a cloke for amusing immoralities, and maternity as a discarded and old-fashioned obligation which was more honoured by evasion than observance; who were worth as little as it is possible for an epitomised folly to represent, and who laughed to scorn the idea that they might be anything better, or truer, or more womanly, if they would.

Knowing her world as she knew it, and being by nature and temperament too cultured and too proud to stoop to its follies, Lady Doris could only present as a shield the cold and passionless exterior which that world declared to be her real self.

But it was that Real Self with whom she was holding commune and confidence in the dark night watches—it was that Real Self, whose sad and searching eyes seemed bent on her now, reading down to her secret soul, and baring the pages of her every feeling.

“Is it not for Love's sake you love, not for your lover's?” a voice seemed demanding. “A great soul cannot mate with a lesser. The sense of superiority on a woman's part lessens by sure degrees the chains that passion forges. Have you not always—always—searched and sought for the deep things of life—the solid grains of an everlasting Truth

among all the chaff and dust of the world's offerings? How, then, can this love content you? It is fierce, mastering, imperious; it wraps you round like a living flame, rising fierce and high, by might of the breath that fans it. But the hot love is the short-lived, and when you turn to it for warmth, you are scorched by its flame for one brief hour, only to be chilled by its ashes for all the hours to follow."

She closed her eyes, and leaned back wearily in her chair.

A sudden drowsy numbness overpowered her, and it seemed to her that she slept and dreamed; yet with senses wide awake and strung to some high and subtle tension, the like of which she had never known.

And as she dreamed, a tall and stately form, with a dark face, grave almost to sadness, seemed to glide slowly into the room, and there, standing with dark, mysterious eyes bent upon her own, and arms folded on its breast, it spoke:

"What your heart has told you is the truth. Your life has been starved of love, and now you say you have found it. Beware—the voice that whispers to your soul speaks out a greater truth than you dare acknowledge. Love sways you, moves you, compels you, but the one thing that could bring content to you as its gift, is lacking. You want what few women ever dream of desiring. The world will not give it you, nor any man, nor any human love, but least of all the love that you have stooped to accept . . . The pure to the impure, the wise to the fool, the higher to the lower nature—these are not meant to mate, and they know it. To disobey the instinct that warns, is to bring down sorrow, and suffering and shame. There are laws so just, so beautifully balanced that, from all time to all time, they stand immutable and incapable of amendment. There is a love born of the senses, fostered by attraction, maddening with uncertainty, a love that defies reason and wisdom, sweet with all sweetness, but brief as a summer night. For such a love lives have been wrecked again and again; for such a night the whole colourless days of men's 'afterwards' been sacrificed. There is, yet again, a love, slow to begin,

yet sure of its every step as it sinks slowly, surely, into the heart. A love, giving greatly, and asking little return ; a love to trust in, to rest in, to be sure of, as the sands of time shift beneath the passing footsteps of Change, and Sorrow and Despair. It is not often it comes—that latter love—not often, but it has the charm of all others deep hidden in its core, as the flower holds its scent. It is passion and reverence, and friendship, and worship, all combined. It is humble, not assertive ; and patient, because strong ; and gentle, because its patience is infinite. These two loves stand before you now. Choose which you will take. The choice is rare to women's lives, but it has come to yours."

Then she seemed to stir and move restlessly, and her eyes opened and gazed at that calm, inscrutable face with something of wonder and of awe.

"Who are you," she asked, "who know so much of me, and of my life?"

The sweet sonorous voice answered calmly, "I am one to whom Knowledge is a closer friend than the frail clay of Humanity. I am one who has learnt to live alone, because solitude holds deeper truths and wider lessons than man teaches, in his narrow groove of self-contented tradition. I build not in words, but in deeds ; and what I seek to know, I must know. I can read your Fate, but, though I cannot avert, I can warn. They say women care nought for warnings—they are but added incentives to resolves already formed. Yet you have less of the lower element of womanhood in you than most of your sex and in this love you gain less than you give. It is for your own peace—your own happiness—your own future, that I warn you now. Trust not your heart—it is weak ; trust not your senses—they are spell-bound ; trust not your brain—it is dazed. But trust your soul, and the voice that speaks to you from thence, for that cannot lie—nor would crime, or shame or folly desecrate the world, did men but listen to the one thing in and of them that *is* true. But they will not. They are blind and deaf to all save what ministers to their pleasures, or necessities. But you—you are not deaf yet, though passion blinds your eyes."

"No," she said. "I am not deaf or blind, but I love him."

"You—think—you love him."

"I love him," she repeated, and a little quick sob broke from her heart. "Oh, why is my life to be always denial and repression—a cold, hard, colourless thing, where I am always alone, and always weary, and always eating my soul out with vain longings?"

"Take the wise love—the love that will last. In time that will content you—your nature will grow and strengthen—it will not be warped and stunted, and spoiled, as this mad and reckless love of yours can spoil it."

"I do not desire that other love—or return it."

"It is great and pure and unselfish enough to lift you to itself—to be stay, and help, and comfort, yet ask no reward."

"I care not. I have no heart to give—nor any memory—nor any regard—save for him to whom I gave myself to-day."

"Will you try him—will you prove for yourself his unworthiness?"

She hesitated. A slight flush came into her face. "No—I love him. In that, all is said."

A deep sigh in the stillness. A faint chill breath upon her cheek. She started, and looked round. The room was empty. The fire had burned low in the grate. She rose to her feet, her eyes bewildered, and, vaguely alarmed, looked back into the shadows.

"I—I must have slept—I must have dreamt," she said to herself, and shivered as with the touch of some chilling fear. She saw her face reflected in the mirror beyond, and it seemed lined, and wan, and haggard, as if pain and time had written on it a story of suffering and endurance.

She went close to the glass, and looked long and searchingly at herself. "Is it only my beauty for which he loves me?" she thought, "the poor shell in which 'I' dwell? Can I keep him—hold him—by anything greater, deeper, stronger, worthier than just what he sees—there? If sickness—disfigurement—accident—robbed me of this bloom of cheek—this lustre of eye—this wealth of hair—this outline

of form and feature, I know that to myself I should still be the same — as well worth loving, as true of heart and nature, as I am now. But he—he—would he think so? Is there not in all men's nature that which craves for external perfection, which, flushed with passion and triumph, delights to place its idol before an envious crowd, crying, 'Behold—look! 'This is mine—*mine only!* This face, this form, this loveliness, this grace! I am their possessor!'"

She sighed and turned away and slowly paced the room, her long white skirts flowing in softly undulating lines over the rich carpet.

"No use," she cried to her heart. "No use to rebel. That which created you for man's curse is un pitying to you still. Though you had all knowledge, and all wisdom, and love that was infinite, and virtue that was angelic, it would not serve you to win any man's love like the mere external beauty which maddens and attracts his senses. Deny yourself to those senses, and he cares for you less than for the veriest impurity that beauty masks! . . . Oh, life! life! mystery of all the ages that have been and are to be, what have you done for us whom sex has cursed, save to breed longings and bitterness and passionate striving for that which the masterhood of man forbids? . . . We must act as others act; follow the rule and law of tyranny, yet meekly kiss the feet of ruler and of law-maker. March on, on, with the weak and frivolous crowd, or be trodden down by force of numbers. Truly, the fools are the wise, seeing they ask not of the Why or the Beyond, but drink the shallow cup of each new day's delight, unquestioning and uncaring for the nature of the draught."

CHAPTER X.

HIS THOUGHTS.

THERE was triumph, wild, and deep, and exhilarating, in Trevanion's heart. He had won his prize at last. The cold, proud beauty, for whom men had sighed so vainly, the wealthy and high-born queen of Society, against whom no tongue could utter reproach, nor the most censorious invent a slander. She had stooped from her throne of honour and dignity, and held out to him the white hand which others far worthier had coveted without success. The clear, grave eyes had drooped before his own; the calm face flushed and paled like that of a timid schoolgirl. The proud sweet lips had trembled in answering passion to the mute compelling of his passionate caress. She loved him! she loved him! All night long that one thought was in his heart, set to rhyme with all sweetest possibilities of a possible future; all night he seemed to feel that beautiful yielding form as it had rested against his beating heart with the tremulous, timid grace born of the first shy reluctance of acknowledged conquest.

Gradually the triumph and the pride began to subside, and a little thrill of shame, and almost of regret, took its place. He looked back on his life; its stained pages, its ignoble pursuits, its indolence, and uselessness, and selfishness. Fit gifts, surely, to bring to one who might have graced a monarch's throne by right of a grand and noble nature. He had always lived for himself; he had never, so far as he could remember, denied himself a single thing he could possibly obtain from the weakness or ignorance of his fellow men. The culture and instruction lavished on his youth had, in a measure, created a distaste for the absolute coarseness of sin, but in all ways of refining vice, and minis-

tering to his senses, and feeding his inborn delight in beauty and pleasure, he had been a veritable master.

Now Love, in its purest, deepest sense, had at last touched him; between that kiss of yesterday and all the kisses that his lips had wooed and won, a gulf seemed to yawn. The tyranny of natural instincts lost their power, and he felt, even in his hour of triumph, that his own unworthiness rose like a barrier between himself and the purity and generosity of this great creature.

"I ought never to have done it. I ought never to have returned," he said, remorsefully, as he lay tossing and wakeful on his pillows, watching the pale grey dawn. "I am not worthy to touch the hem of her garments, still less to call her 'wife.' And yet—and yet she loves me. I wonder why?"

He bent his head on his clasped hands in some dim and instinctive effort at prayer or worship. "God . . . make me a little worthy of her . . ." he cried passionately, but even as the cry left his lips, the sense of its futility smote him with all the bitterness of mockery.

Why should God hear that cry among all the million, million cries of earth which sorrow and remorse were momentarily wringing from tortured hearts? He had believed in no God, he had neither faith nor hope, nor any strong moral principle, in his nature. He had lived and laughed and taken every good thing that life offered, and now, why should he blame results that had been self-created, or appeal against them to a mythical Power in which he had never believed?

The awed, wistful reverence of childhood, which learns at its mother's knee of One who loves and controls its destiny, had never been his. Religion was a mere vague something at which he had scoffed in youth's light-hearted day of enjoyment. Never, so far as he could remember, had a thought of earnestness, a dream of Faith, a hope of future beatitude troubled or perplexed him.

Material life was all he could see or comprehend. Immortality he had never considered as in any way deserving of deep thought. It lay at the bottom of a casket of mysteries into which he had never peered. *There seemed nothing in him to demand, or deserve it.*

What was Man? Had not Mandhar Ram explained that to him again and again. A bundle of carbon, a combination of gases, a mass of organs, senses, feelings, that, being physical, affected him physically, and were stunted or developed according to his circumstances and surroundings. Human nature was but one combination of elements. Analysed and dissected, the component parts were exactly the same.

Civilized beings threw a little gloss and superficiality over their feelings, but the feelings were identical with those that beat in the breast of the savage in the most uncivilized corner of the plane of earth-life.

He knew all this so well, so well. Science had preached it, common-sense had preached it. Material life, as it unwound itself from the skein of its birthright, had proclaimed it. Why, then, did he to-night feel troubled and perplexed and uncertain? Why did that faint cry to a Being in whose personality he had no faith, and in whose justice he had seen but an irresponsible tyranny, rise in his heart, and force its utterance into the black, dim vault of space, that for him meant only nothingness?

Why, indeed? Had love spiritualized him at last? Had the greater nobility of a greater nature, which in some dim way he recognized and worshipped, taught him the higher truths of a higher life than he had ever imagined?

The physical beauty would fade with age; the senses would be dulled and deadened; emotions would lose their charm, passion die of satiety, and then—what? Life would be over, a dull blank, a dreary stupor would steep the years as they dragged their weary length along to the grave, the “poppied sleep—the end of all.”

He rose at last, feverish and impatient, and went to the window and threw it open to the cool grey dawn.

“Would she love me if she knew me as I am?” his heart seemed to ask, and all his past seemed to rise in black and shameful array before his eyes. He had been bold and reckless, improvident and careless, pleasure-seeking, heedless of pain to others so he obtained his own desires, but now, in the cool, sweet calm of this new day, his soul seemed to receive a new baptism. His heart trembled

within him as if awaiting some supreme moment of his destiny, a destiny that he knew would realize the maddest, sweetest dream his life had ever known.

"She loves me, she loves me!" he cried aloud to the silence, and the sun rose red and glorious in the sky above, and the birds burst into wild glad singing from every bough of the dusky trees, and afar off the swell and beat of the sea rang out its measured cadence. But even as the echo of his triumph died away, his heart grew still with fear, for, cold and inexorable as the fate it foredoomed, the voice and presence that had ruled his life rose before his eyes.

"She loves not you, but what she thinks you are. It could be only mercy to undeceive her, ere you add another crime to the list of many that have stained and marked your life."

"What crime," he asked, with sudden indignation, "is there in my love for her? It is the one pure and true sentiment that my life has known."

"Then tempt her not to danger and destruction. What woman has loved you without suffering for that love? Do you not know your own nature yet? Unstable and selfish to the core; desiring, but to weary of the desire when attained; fascinating, but to repel and break the heart you lure; Swayed by impulse, changeful as the skies of spring, wooing ever the beauty that fans the flame of desire, pausing not for the happiness, or the welfare, or the peace you wreck in each pursuit. Yet, now, I warn you—pause. Another love is offered at the shrine where you have laid your own. A love, lofty, patient, noble, enduring. Remove but your influence, and she is safe. Passion will no longer blind her eyes, the magnetism of the senses will cease to attract and enthrall her nature. Once again, I warn you, for to me alone is known the secret of your life . . . the secret that ever and again throws its chill and baffling shadow over you! Ask not what I mean. The voice that has spoken before whispers even now at the door of your heart. Shall I tell you what it says? You shudder and grow pale! You do not need another proof of the power I wield?"

"Are you fiend, or devil?" muttered Trevanion hoarsely. "What do you know of me that gives you the right to torture me thus?"

"I know only this," said the voice mournfully—"only this, that your heart has whispered, and your dreams have breathed. *You are not as other men!*"

For a moment the silence was so deep and so intense, that it seemed to Trevanion as if the loud beats of his heart were deafening him. Those words—the spoken echo of a fear with which he had battled again and again—what did they mean? Sometimes, in the whirl of a mad orgie, in the fever of a gambling bout, in the moment of an attained and ardent passion, he had heard them. Like a knell they had sounded at the door of his heart, chilling, terrifying, bewildering. And now another voice gave them utterance, and he looked back with a strange and mastering dread, into the deep inscrutable eyes that so solemnly gave back glance for glance.

"In what respect do I differ?" he asked at last, and his very voice was changed, and seemed to ring out harsh and discordant on the still and balmy air of the young day.

"The time is not yet ripe for you to hear that truth," said Mandhar Ram solemnly. "Your life has been permitted to run on in its thoughtless course, but even to the most careless and the most material life, there comes an hour when it learns the responsibility of its actions, and stands face to face with the Self that judges and condemns. The wise seize that hour and profit by its teachings, the fool scoffs at and passes it by, and buries self-reproach in deeper depths of folly—dulling the senses till they cease to sting, steeping conscience in some poisoned Lethe that filters through the world's dark valleys. To you that hour has come. You, too, may profit by, or reject its warning. See, the last star sinks already in the brightening firmament. Remember how once before I warned you. Ere that star rises once again on the shadowy borders of night you may choose between you own selfish will, or another's wider and more perfect happiness. Take from her the spell of your presence. Let her know that you never yet resisted a temptation, or denied a desire, or knew pity for the outcast, or

helped the sick and sorrowful. Let her know that in you is but self incarnate, without the redeeming spark of divine fire that is the one gift impossible to mortal power, or mortal knowledge. The scales will fall from her eyes. She will be saved. A sadder woman, perhaps, and a humbler one, but a woman whose life may be perfected, not spoiled, glorified and not marred by the fires of suffering through which she must pass."

The star sank suddenly into a golden sea of brightness, the birds from bough and brake once more burst into song. Just for a moment's space Trevanion covered his eyes with his hands, dazzled by the glory and the beauty that sprang into birth with the breath of day.

When he again looked up, he was alone.

Then a very tempest of emotions seemed to rage and swell within him. Impatient of the space that confined him he leapt from the window, and, with hurried, frenzied steps, betook himself to the sea.

The roar of the billows, the spray of the ascending foam, the wild shrieks of the scattered sea-birds, seemed more in harmony with his mood, than the tranquil beauty of fields and woodland. But amidst the thunder of breaking waves and dashing spray, he seemed only to hear those strange words which again and again had chilled and terrified him in the years of his boyhood, in the pursuits of youth, the wild follies and excesses of manhood—" *You are not as other men.*"

In what way did he differ? Physically he was superior to most men. He had a face and form that challenged the most critical comparison. His health was splendid, endurance and strength were knitted in every muscle and limb of the strong and supple frame. His intellectual powers were brilliant if unstable, his talents numerous and facile. *And yet there was a difference.* He had felt its chill shadow again and again, but never had it seemed so chill and terrifying as when it had reached him in the spoken words of that strange being who had been the ruler and instructor of his early life. The dread that even to his secret soul he had never dared to speak, had at last found utterance. He knew that his capabilities for evil were vast, and almost

devilish. Often in the madness and fierceness of some base pursuit it had seemed to him that he was a mere embodiment of the evil principles of man, and he had shrunk appalled from a field of possibilities to which his nature held the key. He had met men, even bad and vicious men, who yet seemed to have one redeeming virtue, one soft spot in the hard and stony fabric of self, but in his secret soul he knew he had neither. Only with the first breath of a deep and intense love had a single regretful or remorseful thought sprung up from the seedling of a self-acknowledged shame. Only when the purity and beauty of true womanhood dawned slowly and surely on the horizon of his life, did he perceive how much he had lost, how much he might gain, and then sink back ashamed and aghast at the unworthiness of the claim he had advanced.

Love ! . . . His love and hers. Could the self-same word embody feelings so widely different ? His pulses beat feverishly, he remembered the strange thrill that had seemed to reach his very heart's core as those sweet warm lips had trembled on his own. Never, never in any hour, at any time, had so strange and subtle, and almost painful a delight, owed its origin to a woman's yielded kiss. Never—so it seemed to him now—would he ever care so to hold another woman to his heart, or seek from other lips the mute caress that had granted with so proud and tender a grace the promise of a heart's full and passionate love.

And yet, while the one most perfect dream his life had ever known promised its realization, while yet in mingled pride and triumph he acknowledged that this eagerly coveted prize was won, he had been told to relinquish her to another and a worthier love. He lifted his head and shook back the curls of hair that clustered thick and soft about his brow ; his eyes gleamed bright, daring, defiant, at the wild sea and the restless birds.

How brief a space was life after all to live in and be glad. Why should he deny himself this one good and beautiful gift that Fate had cast at his feet ? How all other women paled by comparison with her. So lovely, so pure, so grand and noble of nature, so generous of soul, so true of heart,

and she would be his—his very own. His, though he had neither rank, nor wealth, nor name, nor fortune fit to mate with hers ; though to men who were envious and women who were jealous, he was but an adventurer, a vagabond, a suitor as unworthy as the beggar at her door, or the servitors who took her wages and did her bidding.

“They will say that, and more,” he muttered, as his brow clouded, and his eyes darkened with troubled thought. “But what matters it ? she will not listen, and I—have I ever heeded the tongues that cavil, and slander, and reproach ? Never in all my life when between their sound and my desire, they sought to raise a barrier of division. Treachery she would not forgive, nor faithlessness, nor untruth ; but by her side and in her arms I could swear fidelity, and keep the oath. Base I may have been—*may ?*—nay, why not speak the truth—I *have*—again and yet again—but I have never loved before, and love will teach me how to serve, and please, and keep my lady’s heart.”

He cast aside with resolute strength the memory of that warning he had heard, the regrets that had chilled and saddened him.

A flood of joy seemed suddenly let loose in his heart ; it filled and intoxicated his every sense. He forgot all, save the one fact that she would be his ; body and soul, *his*—by day, by night, through years of chance or change, or bliss or sorrow—life of his life—her whole existence surrendered to his will and wish. Again the evil side of his strange nature claimed the mastery ; again passion, triumph, desire, asserted themselves and bent him to their will. Again, as he had once before defied in the scorn and certainty of his strength, so he defied again the voice that warned, the Fate that threatened ; and all the air seemed throbbing as his heart throbbed with mad delight, and sky and sea and air were only voices echoing the music of his own glad song—the song that for all his life might be set to the passion and ecstasy of fulfilled desire—“She loves me ! she loves me ! she loves me !”

CHAPTER XI.

A MAN'S FIDELITY !

A WEEK of happiness.

It is rare that two mortals can claim such a space of time without a shadow on its brightness—a doubt of its reality, a fear of its possible extent. But, for one glad perfect week, Trevanion and Lady Doris were just as deeply, passionately, dreamfully happy, as is possible for human lives to be. One had yielded to a love long fought against, the other had won a love long fought for. Like two combatants exhausted with futile strife, they laid down their arms, and were at peace.

A week—seven golden days of mutual companionship—of love and laughter, and song. Seven nights of tired delight and perfect dreams and hopes that only breathed “to-morrow ;” a week during which each accepted the day and the hour and what it brought, undisturbed by the morbid terrors of self-analysis. No why or wherefore intruded on that perfect peace ; each gave themselves into the arms of the happiness that had offered itself as a resting-place, and all unwearied chanted still to the flying, silver-shod hours, that untired, untiring song of all earth's children—“I love ! I love !”

But it could not last ; such hours never do. No single act, or sentiment, or event, or emotion of life is stationary. On—and ever on—is the watch-cry of destiny. On—on to the inexorable end, that again is but the beginning, and yet again the end. On—on in the revolving circle of events that pass and repass, that die but to be reborn, and yet being thus reborn again must die. The life of the body

and the life of the soul are knit in close and wonderful mystery. Each have their season of Life and Dreams, the real and the unreal, the sleep and the awaking ; and here and there in sleep we stretch out longing arms, crying and craving for a little joy, a little peace, a little sunshine ; and sometimes our cry is heard, but oftener disregarded, or the joy has ashes at its core, and the peace is but the re-action of a great sorrow or a frenzied fear, whose very intensity brings exhaustion, and the sunshine is but a rift in thick black clouds that part to close again in denser darkness.

But this one week of acknowledged and united love was as nearly perfect as any faulty and troubled space of time could be. Then—it ended.

The end was abrupt and unexpected. Trevanion received a summons to London, connected with a certain firm of that Chosen Race, whose chief province seems to be to fatten on Christian dupes, and charge the maximum of interest for the minimum of "accommodation."

He could not explain the reason for his absence to Lady Doris ; he vaguely described it as "business," that useful word which, no doubt, Mephistopheles invented for the benefit of unfaithful husbands, and wearied lovers.

Not that Trevanion came under either category, as yet. He was, indeed, most irate and indignant at the peremptory demands of his Hebrew friends, but he knew he must obey, lest, indeed, "a worse thing should come unto him."

His departure was too sudden for a long leave-taking, and it was not much brightened by the news his *fiancée* gave him, that her cousin and Colonel Herbert were making a tour in Cornwall, and she had asked them to Porhynna for a week or two.

She drove him to the station herself. She was very quiet, and looked very pale. The shock and surprise of this sudden parting had saddened her more than its brief probability of extent seemed to warrant. "I hate good-byes," Trevanion said, abruptly, as he held her hand in his, and looked down into the sweet sorrowful depths of her beautiful eyes. "Oh, my dearest, you will be true?

You won't forget? You won't listen to what others say of me? Promise me that."

Perhaps her look answered him better than any words. He bent his head and kissed the hand he held.

Five minutes later he was alone. Alone with the feverish exultant memories of this one week, throbbing and pulsing in his heart.

* * * * *

Even to the most devoted and passionate lover the strife and movement and pleasures of men come as an almost welcome relief from the constant society and presence of his beloved. He chafes naturally and impatiently at the silken cord which holds him to her side, after a while. "*Je reste, tu t'en vas*" is always the woman's cry. She is wise if she has sense enough, and confidence enough, to sever the cord whenever its restraint becomes manifest—sever it without reproach or blame, but with just that one excuse, "His nature demands it."

And so it is. To men sooner than to women comes the satiety and fatigue and restlessness which follow the fruition of passion. He cannot play the lover at her footstool always, and she would fain assign him that part, and that alone, until she herself wearied. But she resents the fact that he should weary first, and—he invariably does.

So after the first few hours, where the memory of parting had left its sting of regret, Trevanion began to think of the allurements and excitements of the city to which he was speeding. His business troubles did not affect him now. The news of his approaching marriage to the wealthy and titled widow of David Marchmont would be enough to make every member of the illustrious firm of Isaacs & Co. cringe in the dust before him, and become as accommodating in the matter of discount and renewal, as now they were obstinate in refusal.

The world would smile on him—society would welcome him with open arms, and congratulate him on his good fortune. He might safely promise himself a week of enjoyment—a week, every day of which would be gladdened

by her letters—the written assurance of that love he had won.

“She will write beautiful letters, I am sure,” he thought to himself. “Nothing mawkish or sentimental. No sickening school-girlish reiteration of terms of endearment. They will be like herself—noble, tender, proud. Easy and unconventional as only perfect taste and perfect culture can make them. I wish it were possible to have the first even now.”

Then he laughed a little, and drew out his cigarette-case, and set himself to smoke with laudable perseverance, that being a pleasure as yet untouched by satiety.

* * * * *

Trevanion had been right when he told himself that the announcement of his approaching marriage would facilitate the speedy settlement of debts and obligations—obligations so numerous, that even that lucky *coup* at Monte Carlo could not set him straight.

He had Lady Doris' permission to announce their engagement, and he took good care that Society journals and club rooms should learn it without delay.

It was the fag-end of the season, but enough people were in Town to envy, and wonder at, and discuss the news.

The day after his arrival came one of Hilda St. Maur's scented and somewhat arbitrary notes, inviting him to dinner that evening.

He went—for amusement, so he told himself—in truth a little flushed and excited with his conquest and the triumph it promised.

He found her alone. Two other guests had been invited, but—so she said—had thrown her over at the last moment, so there was nothing but a *tête-à-tête* evening in prospect.

The dinner was charming, and Hilda herself looked lovely in a dress of the palest sea-foam green, which displayed as much of her small and beautifully-shaped person as the laxity of fashion would permit. Her red-gold hair was twisted in soft loose coils about her head, and a diamond butterfly glowed amidst its masses.

Her eyes sparkled with malice and mischief as she gave him her hand and laughed up in his face.

"Is it true?" she said. "One may be excused for doubting, I hope?"

"It is quite true," he said, somewhat stiffly.

"Well," she said, "accept my congratulations. They are rather one-sided. I confess I do not see what Doris has to gain by marriage. But then—I always envy widows."

"Do you?" he said. "I think that married women nowadays have all the liberty they can possibly desire, even with that much-abused incumbrance—a husband."

"It seems impossible to fancy you playing that part," she said. "I do not think you are a good subject for matrimony. It will spoil you, and Doris will be *exigeante*, I warn you."

"Whatever she may be I shall not blame her," he said. "I feel too much the honour she has done me."

"That is a very courtier and lover-like speech," she said, with her little malicious laugh. "But in a year you will consider the honour merely as a right."

Then they went in to dinner, and the conversation touched only upon general topics.

Later on they returned to the little Turkish smoking-room, and she threw herself down on a divan covered with rich Oriental stuffs, and lighted a cigarette, and watched him do the same, while the servant brought in coffee and Tokay and set them down on one of the little Moorish tables.

"Now," she said, "tell me frankly, are you very much in love? I should like to know what the sensation is like. I have outlived most—but it is always a comfort to meet people who haven't. Doris is one—but then she always did take life *au grand sérieux*."

"Have you only asked me here to talk of her?" he said.

He knew well enough that nothing bored a woman so much as hearing the praises of another from the lips of a man who loved her.

"Not quite," she said, looking up at him with her sparkling eyes, and then lowering them suddenly as she met his gaze. He was standing by her side, looking down at the graceful form, in its pose of Oriental abandonment—at the

head pillowed on her bare white arm—the snowy softness of the throat and bust, that the filmy folds of sea-green *tulle* made a pretence of veiling.

Something she read in his eyes made her cheeks redden and her heart throb. She blew a cloud of smoke with petulant pertness into his face. "Don't look at me like that!" she said impetuously. "I am not—Doris."

"My God, no!" he muttered hurriedly, as he turned and lit the cigarette he had been twisting in his fingers.

"Pour me out some Tokay," she said imperiously. "You may take some yourself, if you will, unless you are under orders against all self-indulgence."

He smiled as he obeyed her. "Not yet," he said. "Doris has laid no commands upon me."

"If she had," she asked softly, "would you obey? Somehow I cannot fancy you tamed, or in leading strings to any woman."

She took the glass from his hand, and looked up again into his eyes. Her own were seductive, entreating, dangerously soft and lovely in the subdued light of the room.

"I should obey anything in reason," he said, conscious of the growing ardour of her glance, and a little inclined to be angry with himself that he had weakly come into the very fire of temptation; he who never in all his life had resisted, or tried to resist one that pleased him.

"Supposing," she said, still more softly, "that she forbade you to—kiss—any other woman?"

He laughed almost brutally.

"Do you mean yourself, Hilda?" he said. "What are you driving at? If you were not a woman of the world—a leader of Society, I might say you had learned your arts of provocation in a good school."

"You used to kiss me once," she said, unabashed by his look or tone, which in themselves held scarcely veiled insult.

"Shall I do so again?" he said, and half bent over her, and drew the cigarette from the parted crimson lips.

Their eyes met in a sudden challenge, sharp and swift as meeting swords. She did not speak, only suddenly her

whole person seemed to sway towards him, and she wound her arms, supple as silk and strong as steel, about his neck.

"Oh Jack," she cried passionately, "I love you! I love you! You have been cruel to me always—and yet I love you as I could not love the kindest and best man in the world. Oh, kiss me, Jack—once—just once, and let me cheat myself into forgetfulness. . . . After to-night nothing matters. No—not if the world ends and Hell is not a dream but a reality. Give me one grain of comfort for all the misery you have caused me."

Just for an instant Trevanion drew himself away ever so slightly from the clinging arms, the warm breath, the scent of the pale tea-roses that nestled in the white breast of his temptress. Just for an instant—between her face and his—there flashed the white proud beauty of the woman who would be his wife.

Then the compelling clasp of the slender arms drew him nearer—closer. He heard her heart beat—he saw the flash of triumph in her eyes. The baseness of impulse and desire swayed and shook him as it had done a hundred times before, and found him still, as it had found him then—powerless to resist what he knew was evil.

The passionate caress that wooed him to forgetfulness, swept like a burning breath over the memory of the one pure and perfect love he had ever known. It was tossed aside, forgotten, swept utterly away by the tempest that broke over all his senses. He did not love this woman—he did not care—but all the same——

* * * * *

When he returned to his hotel, the first thing that greeted his eyes was a letter on the table in his room. He seized it eagerly. It was the first letter Lady Doris had written him.

As he read the tender words, as he saw revealed in every line the noble trust and purity and faith of its writer, a wave of agonized remorse swept over his heart.

Self-condemned, he stood and confronted his own unworthiness, remembering too late the fidelity he had only sworn—to break.

Suddenly he rushed to the window and threw it open, and drank in deep draughts of the cool night air, while his eyes sought the stars that were shining overhead; the self-same stars that gazed on her and heard her prayers for him.

As he gazed, something keen and sharp as bodily anguish seemed to tear at his heart, and pulse in his brain. His head drooped on his folded arms, and in the silence of the room came the sound of a hoarse, choking sob.

"My God!" he cried aloud. "What beasts we are—and yet—angels love us!"

For indeed it seemed that in comparison with the women he had known, who had wooed him or whom he had wooed, this one woman stood out as a pure and holy thing, whose white robes he had no right to touch, whose heart he had no right to claim—of whose love, and faith, and trust, he was utterly and for ever unworthy.

CHAPTER XII.

"HELPLESS."

"REPENT! of course she will repent!" the Baroness Güldenstern was saying, with as near an approach to irritation and impertinence as she ever permitted herself. "I never heard of anything so senseless and foolish in my life. I think myself, when a woman has had the good fortune to be left a widow, wealthy and unencumbered as Doris is, she should thank Providence every day of her life for the freedom. But to marry such a man as she has selected—a nobody, an adventurer, with nothing but a handsome face to bring as the 'endowment' of which the marriage service speaks, and to marry him, too, for that most senseless reason of 'Love'—well, I simply cannot find in words an adequate expression of feeling."

She looked with her bright, keen eyes at the troubled face of her companion, Colonel Herbert, who, with Errol, had arrived that afternoon.

"Is it quite—settled?" he asked.

His face was very pale, he kept it in shadow, but the woman beside him was clever enough to read more skilfully-concealed secrets than the one that was gnawing at his strong and faithful heart.

"As nearly settled," she said, "as such a matter can well be, when only the two chief personages are concerned, one of whom gives all, and the other takes all. He was here every day and all day. They seemed absolutely infatuated. I grant he is very charming," she added, with a sigh, "and he filled a difficult position with perfect ease and grace."

"Oh!" said Colonel Herbert bitterly. "He has played the part of lover too often, and under too many circumstances and conditions, not to be perfect in the *rôle*."

"It is a curious fact," said the Baroness thoughtfully, "that women resent awkwardness and bashfulness on the part of a lover, and yet, if they were wise, they would welcome the signs as a confession of a comparatively pure past. It is the inconstant, the experienced, the vicious men who have every art and trick of love-making at their fingers' ends, and to whom every note in the scale of protestation, provocation, and devotion, are familiar. How odd we are. We appreciate the experience, but we would like to abolish the school that teaches it."

"A gambler, a duellist, an adventurer, a man whose name has been linked with the most notorious women of London and Paris—faugh! such a marriage is sacrilege," muttered Colonel Herbert wrathfully.

"Why don't—you—prevent it?" asked the Baroness.

"I——?" He started and looked at her. "What do you mean, madame?" he asked unsteadily.

"Listen," she said, and drew nearer to him, and lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "I have made it my business to find out as much as I can respecting this handsome scapegrace. I find that he has lived at the queer old place they call the Hall, with an eccentric piece of humanity now in his dotage—his uncle, so he says—and a mysterious individual, a sort of modern Zanoni, ever since he was five years old. But I have a natural curiosity in the matter of pedigree, and I gave myself some trouble to trace

the history of the Trevanions. I have ascertained that the old man had a brother certainly, but he died when quite a lad. *He had no other relative*; he was never married himself. Who, then, is the individual he calls his nephew?"

"Perhaps," said Colonel Herbert, "he is a descendant of some branch line, whom he adopted, and to whom he gave his name."

The Baroness shook her head. "No," she said, "I have taken good care to find out *that*. There is one person and only one who could enlighten us," she continued presently. "It is the mysterious Oriental, Mandhar Ram. But he is never to be seen, and I scarcely like to beard him in his den." Then she looked sharply up at her companion's pale, grave face. "You—might do it," she said; "you and Errol. There is no reason why you should not call—no reason why you should not put any questions you deem fitting. I only ask you for the results."

Colonel Herbert was silent. He remembered his conversation with Errol that June night in Piccadilly; how they had both determined to fathom the mystery about this man; to watch him and discover, if only such discovery were possible, what was that secret and indescribable "want," that made him less human even in his sins and recklessness than men who had as many vices and as few scruples as himself.

Trevanion's abrupt disappearance from town, and his prolonged stay at Monte Carlo, had for a time baffled their intentions. Now—well, now, he told himself, with a heavy sigh, that whatever he discovered would probably make very little difference. He had won that beautiful prize so long and vainly coveted—won, with scarce an effort, what he himself would have given years of toil and devotion to accomplish.

"Do you propose, then, that we should call; Errol and I?" he said at last.

"Yes," answered the Baroness. "Errol is a relation, you a friend. There is nothing unusual in your making the acquaintance of the near relations of the accepted husband of Lady Doris Marchmont."

Colonel Herbert winced. The task was not agreeable or to his liking, even though he felt curious to see what manner of people these were.

"I don't know," he said, "if Errol would care about it; but I have no objection to accompany him if he wishes to call."

"Oh! he will care about it," said the Baroness, nodding her head sagaciously. "He is none too pleased with his cousin's choice. I should not mention your intention to her," she added.

"I suppose it will make no difference," said Colonel Herbert, with a sigh. "*Ce que femme veut*, you know."

"Hush!" said the Baroness, "here she comes!"

* * * * *

Lady Doris was surprised at herself those first three days of Trevanion's absence. Restless, feverish, impatient, all her habitual pride and calmness and content seemed to have utterly forsaken her. She longed for some word, some sign, though she told herself again and again it was almost impossible she could receive a letter yet.

At last a telegram was handed her. His first sign of remembrance for three long days, that to her had seemed as weeks.

It only said: "*Arrived safe. Will write to-morrow.*"

Poor food on which her starved heart must feed for another day and night. She was conscious of a keen disappointment; she thought in his place she would have found means and ways of writing before this. She sighed even as she put the message away, thinking how little men understood women; how seldom they seem to remember that it is the *little* things that touch them most deeply, and hold them most surely—the unexpected message that tells of memory, the remembrance of a flower that was worn at the first meeting, of a colour, a scent, a chance word, a verse of a song linked to some hour of companionship that happy chance had yielded; and as she thought Lady Doris was conscious of the first chill and doubt that is almost inseparable from absence. She knew that to her he was first and all, the only love of her life; but to him,

what was she? One among many, a memory amidst a gallery of memories, a face amidst a crowd of faces; just as fair, just as lovable. He loved her now, but he had loved them also—for a time. Perhaps she would share no better fate. Her charm for him had lain in unattainability; she had scorned and refused his love as insult once. Alas! alas! only to yield in the maturity of womanhood when she was free from the shadowy claims of honour, and none knew better than herself that that honour had been absolutely incapable of mastering her heart with the fidelity her lips proclaimed.

Tears more bitter than any she had ever shed, fell from her eyes as she sat alone in her dressing-chamber, waiting, longing, hoping for that letter which never came.

In truth, Trevanion could not write to her; his lips could lie more easily than his pen. Her letter was an unending reproach to him, and to answer it with the frank spontaneous truth and love it deserved, was a sheer impossibility. He had never before granted to any woman more fidelity than the attraction she held, or the inclination he felt, demanded. But now a vague shame and uneasiness troubled him. It was no use to use the old arguments—to say as he had so often said that the caprice of a moment—the fever and tempting of surprised senses—were not infidelity on the part of a man.

Something—something inexorable and painful—had awoke in his heart and accused him unceasingly, so that he felt afraid to look into those clear and trustful eyes, and even at this distance could only spoil sheet after sheet of paper in a vain endeavour to answer in some way worthy of her, the letter that lay at his heart like a living reproach.

Besides, his temptress was not to be easily shaken off. In that respect she differed from most of the women he had known, and wearied of. She had disarmed his antagonism in the very hour when he deemed himself most safe, and she was a complete mistress of the arts that allure and amuse, and woo men to forgetfulness—an adept in the science of enchantment, besides possessing those instincts

of intrigue and deception which he had always declared to be inborn in womanhood.

Day after day, by some excuse, some plea, she won him to her side.

"You will have her—always," she would say, tears standing in her large deep eyes, that for him were soft as velvet and passionate as an Eastern houri's. "Don't grudge me a few hours before it comes to the inevitable. We must bow to that—soon."

And he submitted, sometimes resentfully, sometimes impatiently, sometimes in sheer devilry of some mood of wild abandonment, sometimes in the endeavour to rid himself of thought and the unusual discomfort of self-reproach. Never, by deliberate will, had he given himself the trouble to think out the consequences or results of any action. He wondered sometimes with an irritation and impatience of himself, why he should do so now. He loved as he had never loved—more worthily, more deeply—but all the same, with him, love was a wingless god of earth, who had no power to fly to higher or to better things. And so he lingered in the Turkish chamber, amidst the lamplight and the laughter, and the fines of smoke, and the sparkle of Perrier Jouet, and the wooing glances, and that gay discursive chatter which was amusing enough to please without taxing his mental capacity. He felt when he left her that he was a coward and untrue, but habit was strong within him and conscience he had never heeded; so slowly and subtly the asp folded him in ever-tightening folds, and day drifted after day, and the letter for which Lady Doris looked with longing feverish eyes, was never written.

Meanwhile the visit to Trevanion Hall had been paid, and Colonel Herbert gratified by sight of the old trembling dotard who was Jack Trevanion's only earthly relative. The strange Oriental being, Mandhar Ram, had been present, but maintained an almost absolute silence. The two visitors were evidently unwelcome and, as Colonel Herbert told the Baroness, gained nothing for their trouble.

"He will have the Hall at the old man's death," he said in conclusion. "That is all he brings in return for the

rank and beauty and princely fortune he will gain. Truly, a fair exchange !”

“It is not a marriage for her, of course,” said the Baroness. “But what is the use of saying so? To try and set a woman against a man is only the surest way of deepening her infatuation, and enlisting her sympathy. She knows all the stories about him, and she is a very pure and very proud woman, and yet she loves him as though he were a Sir Galahad.”

Colonel Herbert turned away. His lips trembled under the shade of their thick moustache. Those words struck sharp and keen as pain to his heart. She loved him—what use to trouble, to plead, to try to avert her fate?

In those three words all was said.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LOVE-LETTER.

THE days dragged their slow length along and Lady Doris lived her usual life, and walked, and rode, and drove, and played the hostess to her friends, but each day seemed to burn a new sensation into her heart. She learnt the agony of a vain expectation, the sickening torture of suspense, the impulses of a passionate wonder and indignation, the regret of wounded pride; she, who had been so proud and self-contained, now only crept away to solitude, to hide the emotion and humiliation of each day's disappointment. She would not let anyone know or see that humiliation, but it ate deeply into her nature, and its corroding touch made her hard and bitter, and passionately angered, so that at times she hardly knew herself.

At the end of that week he had promised to return, but he sent no word to that effect now.

No one spoke his name. Her cousin was too deeply annoyed at the intended alliance to do more than express cold disapprobation. The Baroness, her friend, had more than hinted at the folly of her infatuation. Colonel

Herbert looked careworn and gloomy, and his eyes had a pained and wistful entreaty in their kind grave depths that moved her sometimes almost to tears, for now she knew that love held suffering and endurance, as well as joy and content.

"I wish he did not care," she said, impatiently, as she sat alone in her room.

Then her thoughts reverted again to that absent and unsatisfactory lover, trying still to surround him with the false halo of perfection she had been blind enough to bestow, closing her eyes with a woman's wilfulness to the facts of a past vitiated by low aims, and coarse pleasures, and evil influences; things which might so easily resume their sway over an impressionable temperament and force him once again backwards and downwards into the depths from which her love had sought to raise him.

"Seven days, seven nights," she sighed wearily, "and no word, no sign. Has he forgotten? Is this his faith and truth?"

She, herself, looked worn and pale with many vigils and much weariness. Nervous and dispirited, she leant her head on her arms, and let the slow and bitter tears roll unheeded and unchecked down her pale face.

As a stone falls on a wayside flower, crushing and bruising the delicate petals, so fell this first weight of doubt and fear on her heart. She had listened to no warning; she had believed in him, and in his love; and now, he seemed to proclaim the unworthiness of both with an indifference that was almost contemptuous. As she thought of her letter so long unanswered, of the self-betrayal in its every line, the love and trust it had breathed, the longings that even that brief absence had been long enough to awaken—her heart seemed to grow cold with hurt pride, her face flushed with hot and bitter shame. Never in all her life, never to any human creature, man or woman, had she so unbent and so unveiled the pure and passionate and secret depths of her nature, and she had done this to one who seemed neither to care, nor to understand, nor respond to it.

The agonizing humility of this hour exceeded that of

all the other hours that had preceded it. Her belief in him had received the first rude shock of doubt, and though security sometimes weakens the force of passion, as the fulness of sunshine melts the firm adhesion of the snow, yet security is none the less the most divine and perfect part of love to a nature noble and trustful and generous such as hers.

While still she sat there—her face bent on her hands, the hot tears falling through the clasped and slender fingers—the same strange feeling seemed to creep slowly and chillingly over her that once before had seemed as a dream. Again, a shadowy and indistinct Presence shaped itself slowly out of the gloom, and again a voice, faint and dream-like, yet audible as human speech, seemed to sound to her *inner senses*, less than to her ordinary powers of hearing.

She did not feel startled or alarmed, only a dull and dreamy apathy stole over her whole frame, and wrapped her troubled heart and tortured feelings in a deep and intense calm. “I warned you,” the voice said, in its calm, even accents. “Has not my warning been fulfilled? What has this love given you?—pain, doubt, unrest. You stoop, but it cannot rise—you would fain endow it with the qualities of your own—it is a vain task. None can give more than is in them. Fidelity and strength are not in your lover, and though you strove and laboured all the years of your life, though you sacrificed every glad and holy thing you possessed, you could not pour into his heart one single drop of the pure and perfect tenderness that fills your own. In his way, he loves you, but in that way he has loved so many, and you only one—only him!”

“Only him!” her heart seemed to echo, in the sorrow of a sob that fell across the silence, and remembering the years of struggle and of pain, the long effort at banishing a memory which would not be banished, she cried in bitterness of heart, “Oh! my love, my love! what you have cost me!”

Those years when he had been as her shadow, those years when he had followed and besought her with subtlest

temptings of unuttered passion, the anger and revolt that had given her courage and strength to banish him—all these things rushed back to her memory now, and overwhelmed her as a flood of bitter waters. He was not worth a tithe of the love she had given him, the fidelity she had sworn in her heart, the trust and tenderness that had laid their rich tributes at his feet. No; but, for all that, she could not recall the love, forswear the fidelity, take back the tenderness.

Her face drooped lower in the abandonment of grief, her eyes closed beneath the weight of tears that burned the veined and swollen lids, yet still she seemed to hear that calm still voice, as with unerring accuracy it painted the future, whose avenging miseries she wilfully ignored. Still her heart cried out to the silence of the night, "All my life has been cold and loveless, and now love has come to me, and I cannot banish it even if I would!"

And now the stillness and the silence were unstirred by any warning voice, and she knew she was alone.

* * * * *

She rose next day calm and pale, but with a gentleness and wistfulness about her that was altogether new and infinitely touching in one so proud.

"After all," she said to herself, "a week is not so very long, and to him, engrossed with business and troubled and worried about many things, it might have slipped by so quickly."

Besides, he was not by nature a man to be very considerate of minute attentions, and he had told her he detested writing letters. She could not expect to alter his character and inclinations. Circumstances had shaped them long ago, and against the strength of nature even love is powerless. You cannot alter it.

So another day, and yet another, drifted by, to fall into the lap of the past, but with the tenth a letter came.

She was alone in her own boudoir when it was brought to her. Many disappointments made her chary of looking at the superscription until the servant had left the room. Then—it almost seemed to her worth the pain of waiting

and suspense, to feel that rush of emotion, that wild joy, that passionate delight, sweeping through heart and soul, and pulsing like a full tide in her veins. She knew the bold, clear handwriting so well! She tore open the envelope, and held the thick soft paper between her trembling palms. She could scarcely see the words, so great was her agitation. For one swift instant she carried to her heart and lips the paper that his hands had touched, and his eyes rested upon. Then she began to read :

“I hardly know how to begin this letter. You will think I ought to have written long before this, and after yours ——. My dearest, I can't thank you enough for its sweet words, but oh! don't, don't, *don't* make a hero of me. Don't idealize me into anything better or worthier than I am, a faulty, graceless man, to whom an angel of purity and tenderness has stooped. What use to say I miss you? and yet I cannot return as soon as I expected. I may have to go to Paris next week; not for long—five or six days at most, but still they cut into time, and it is already almost a fortnight since I saw you. I will wire if I go, and give you the address of my hotel. Meanwhile, my beautiful queen, grant a thought sometimes to the unworthy memory of

“YOUR GRACELESS LOVER.”

The effect of the letter upon her was somewhat contradictory. It was too short; it was too abrupt. It did not once say, “I love you.” It gave no response to her own words—the passionate, almost humble tenderness of those closely-covered sheets she had penned with such hopeful trust and delight. Then it spoke of longer absence—further delay; but it gave no description of his life, doings, or occupations. No; on the whole it could not be considered a satisfactory love-letter, and yet for its brief contents she had had to wait ten long weary days.

That dull pain of dissatisfaction which so often follows a falsified expectance crept over her heart now. She placed

the letter on the table by her side, and a little strange, mirthless laugh escaped her.

“Make *him* a hero”—“idealize him into anything better, worthier”—so the thoughts ran hither and thither through her mind, slowly and painfully. Those written words seemed to bring to her a consciousness that the writer’s own personal fascination had never brought—a sense of shallowness, untrustworthiness—the feeling that this was no nature to lean on for strength or help, or even comprehension.

She took the letter up again and replaced it in its envelope without reading it a second time. There was no need, she remembered it well enough. Was it worth while to have so longed, so prayed, so suffered, only for this? Had the man she loved no deeper insight into her nature than to furnish her with such cold comfort? No word of what had been! No hint of joys in the future. Not anything she had expected. Not anything for which she had hoped.

She rose and slowly paced the room, trying to stifle the dull foreboding that oppressed her, trying to believe that the world was right when it said, “Women must never expect more from men than they choose to give, though men may expect from women all that they choose to ask.”

She had been weak, she knew, but that weakness had never seemed to her so unwise as it looked now, and like a sudden revelation she saw that the coarseness of that rough mould in which man is cast, might render him incapable of either comprehending or appreciating the delicacy or constancy of a love which he knew was too surely his own.

She had loved with the love of a poet—a dreamer; and he—with the trivial passion of the world.

Suddenly, cruelly, as pain smites and is cruel, Lady Doris felt this like a spoken truth. She locked her letter safely in a drawer. There was no need to reply to it, and he had not asked for any. Then she went to her dressing-room and put on her hat and coat, and took her way down the broad staircase into the hall.

The Baroness was there, and, seeing her, came hurriedly towards her. “My dear,” she said, “I have had bad news. I was coming to seek you. My sister has been taken

seriously ill. She was on her way to England, but has had to stop in Paris. I must go to her, at once—to-night, if I can manage it."

"To Paris?" faltered Lady Doris.

"Yes; why how startled you look! I am sorry to leave you, and it will be so lonely for you. You would not care to come with me, I suppose? Your cousin leaves to-day, there is nothing to prevent you, unless——"

She paused meaningly.

Lady Doris flushed as she met her glance and read the unuttered sentence.

"No," she said slowly, "there is nothing to prevent me. I—I will come."

"Do you mean it—really?" asked her friend, somewhat surprised at the unexpected acquiescence."

"Yes," she said, "I mean it, I think I am tired of Cornwall, and though Paris will be hot and empty, still, it is always Paris."

"I shall be delighted to have you," said the Baroness.

She was thinking to herself: "How calmly she takes the idea. Have they quarrelled already?"

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE ENDING OF A DREAM."

IN a hurried, feverish way Lady Doris made her preparations. Her acceptance of the idea had been as sudden as its suggestion. She could not account for the impulse. It was altogether unlike her to be capricious or act at random. Yet now she felt she must seize this chance. Why, it would be sweeter, happier for her, only to breathe the same air, only to know the same city held her that held him, than to live in this desolate, wind-blown solitude, which was filled with memories that absence seemed to chill and falsify.

It was not that she suspected, it was not that she feared his truth. Her wildest dreams could never have shown him to her acting as he had acted—sinning as he had sinned. She only saw that a chain of circumstances were holding him apart and aloof, and that chance had offered her a reasonable excuse for breaking that chain.

"He will be so surprised," she thought to herself, and for a moment a little happy smile hovered round her lips. She was standing in the quaint old library of this old Cornish mansion, the room where he had sat with her so often during that one brief happy week.

Her eyes lingered lovingly on the oak bookcases, the low, deep chairs, the great bowls of gorgeous autumn flowers, the wide, open fireplace, where a great log burned itself to ashes in the chilly dusk.

The memories of that passionate, fervid wooing, swept over her like a hot breath. Words, sighs, vows, kisses, the tenderness of looks eloquent of meaning, the story of days and months passed in vain longings, and now replaced by

that vague, sweet awakening to an almost unhopcd-for joy, which is one of the most precious gifts of happiness.

Of all this she thought as she lingered there, saying farewell to the inanimate things that were, for her, so eloquent of meaning. Yet, even as she lingered, a certain chill and sense of fear seemed to come over her. The scent of the autumn flowers in the great china bowls, the far-off throb of the sea, the twittering song of a little wren, perched on a tree outside the windows, the loud barking of the dogs as they dashed out of the stable yard at Errol's call—all these things suddenly seemed to leap into that strong light of a never-to-be-forgotten memory, which at times paints with cruel distinctness its undying colours on the brain.

She shuddered as she turned away and closed the door, for even then, while hope whispered gladly of a coming meeting, something, clear and distinct as spoken words, murmured at her ear, that in that room she and her lover would stand face to face, and heart to heart, never—never again !

In Paris, the world of fashion had taken wing, and dispersed to country houses and foreign baths. But to Lady Doris it would not have mattered had it been a veritable desert. He was there—she might see him at any hour, in any place. Her heart had no room for any other thought.

She wondered sometimes at herself, wondered at the power and strength of this magnetism of love, which had so changed her calm and quiet nature—wondered that she should thrill and tremble, and grow pale, even at the echo of a step, the chance likeness of some face or figure which answered to the expectation of her heart.

One afternoon the Baroness suggested that they should go for a drive. Her sister was much better. She could leave her with the nurse for a couple of hours, so she ordered a pair-horsed victoria, and bade the coachman drive them to the Bois.

It was fairly crowded, in spite of the “emptiness” of Paris. Wealthy Americans, foreign tourists, a sprinkling of English folk to whom Paris was a place for all seasons, and that intermediate class of Society which hangs on the social

fringe of "Monde," and cannot boast of country *chateaux*, or even of invitations to those owned by wealthy and titled friends, were driving and walking around the familiar lake. The sun was setting in a sky of faint primrose, touched here and there by fleecy lines of clouds. Lady Doris glanced mechanically at the moving vehicles in front of her, at the bright flash of wheels, the blue and orange panels, the gaudy facings of some dashing livery favoured by a fashionable actress, or a celebrity of the *demi-monde*.

She leant back and drew the dark furs of the carriage-rug about her. The air was growing chilly, and the last rays of the sinking sun threw faint golden reflections across the leafless boughs of the trees, and the dark belt of the shrubberies beyond. The carriages began to move more rapidly. The beat of many hoofs sounded sharp and clear on the still October air. Suddenly a dashing little *coupé* passed them. As Lady Doris' eyes caught sight of its occupants she started, and leaned eagerly forward. Then—as quickly she leaned back in her seat, her face white as death, her heart beating so wildly it seemed to suffocate her; in her ears a clamour and clang as of a million brazen hammers.

In that *coupé* she had recognised her lover, and close by his side, her hand resting on his knee, her laughing, *riante*, mischievous face upraised to his, sat—Hilda St. Maur.

For one brief moment she was conscious of nothing but the anger and indignation of offended pride. So this was the important business that had taken him to Paris! This the plea for which she was to excuse his absence. A sickening spasm of pain seemed to suffocate her.

The sound of her friend's voice seemed to reach her from afar: "My dear, are you ill? You look so pale."

"Yes," she said hurriedly; "I—I think I have taken a chill. It is so cold here after sunset."

She shivered violently even under the warm furs. It seemed to her that never again would warmth or life creep back into her frozen veins, or gladden her with any sense of its existence.

"Here—and with her!" That was all she could say. Her face looked changed and old and bloodless in the dim light, but she knew only that all the youth and hope and

promise of her life had been stricken and laid low by the first breath of a man's treachery and deception.

She had so loved, so trusted him, and this was how he repaid her. No mere accident could have brought those two together in that comradeship of familiarity. He who had vowed that henceforth all women should be as nothing to him for her sake—that never should his lips touch other lips—yet was now by the side and in the society of a woman whose fascinations were an acknowledged danger, and who had never made any secret of her infatuation for him.

When she reached the Hotel she went straight to her room, refusing all suggestions of tea, or *sal volatile*, or such like remedies for female ailments, on the part of the Baroness.

She flung off her wraps and her dress, and threw herself on the bed in a sudden abandonment of grief and anguish, and jealous pain, that no tears could relieve. Her face burned, her pulses beat. It seemed to her more than she had strength to do, to wait in patience and silence till she should learn the truth from his own lips.

When at last she rose and bathed her eyes and rang for her maid, she was shocked at the sight of her own face.

The woman brought her a letter forwarded from England. As she opened it, an enclosure, in a pale yellow envelope, fell out. It was the telegram containing Trevanion's promised address. Eagerly she tore it open, and read its brief message.

"Fear I may be detained a week or so. Address, Hotel Bristol, Paris.—Yours, J. T."

She crushed the paper in her hand in a sudden revulsion of feeling. The Hotel Bristol was her own hotel. He was *here*—under the same roof as herself!

By the time her toilette was finished she had assumed her usual composure of manner. She bade her maid ask the hotel porter for the number of the room which Trevanion occupied, and to let her know whether he was in the hotel. In about ten minutes' time the woman returned

with the information that the room was 107, and that Mr. Trevanion had just come in, but was going out to dinner.

Lady Doris went to her writing table and wrote a few lines, placed the note in an envelope, and bade her woman see that it was taken to Room 107 at once. Then she went down stairs to their private sitting-room, and awaited calmly, though with beating heart, the answer to her summons.

She had not to wait long. Soon the door was thrown hurriedly open, and one of the attendants announced her lover.

He entered hurriedly, with a certain sense of wonder and surprise in the handsome face and eager eyes that met her own.

"Why, Doris, my darling," he cried, "whatever brought you to Paris?"

Then something in her face—her look—startled him. The hands he had outstretched fell to his side, the words he would have spoken seemed to die, strangled and dumb, on his lips. She saw his face pale, his eyes fall before the challenge of her searching gaze, and it seemed to her that life died out of her heart in the swift, sharp pain which told her of suspicion answered.

"I saw you this afternoon," she said very quietly. "May I ask what—business—has also brought Mrs. St. Maur to Paris?"

He stared at her, stupefied, and angered, and ashamed.

"You—you saw me," he muttered. "Well, what of that? We met by—by chance, and she is alone here. Surely, Doris, you are not one of those silly women who get jealous about the merest trifles!"

The words cut her to the heart. The lesser nature could not comprehend, could not even defend itself. It could only stoop to the meanness of subterfuge, and recrimination.

She seated herself quietly by the table, and signed to him to take a chair.

"I think," she said, "it would be wiser for you to be open with me at the first. I have no right, of course,

to control your actions, or even to question them, but I have a right to hear truth from you, and that, I fear, you have not told me."

His face grew sullen, his eyes dark and stormy. To any other woman he would have spoken rudely and roughly, as is the way of a man who hates to be arraigned for wrong-doing, or called to account for untruth; but to her, he dared not.

"I have been false; I am not what she thinks me," his heart had said again and again during those wasted weeks, and now that he was in her presence, that the calm grave eyes looked back to his, that the proud lips demanded truth from his own, and not caresses, he felt that this woman could not be dealt with as the "others" had been.

Almost he wished now he had never seen her, never loved her. He felt a coward and ashamed, and excuses and lies faltered and stammered on his tongue before that proud unwavering glance.

"I cannot understand what you mean," he said, at last, in impatience and confusion. "I told you the truth. I *had* business in Paris. If—if I met an old friend, and she drove me in her *coupé* for an hour, is that a sin?"

Lady Doris' face grew colder and prouder than before. She looked at the handsome figure in its faultless evening dress, at the frowning brow, the clouded eyes, and her heart grew cold and sick within her breast.

"A sin? No," she said, gently, "if, as you say, you only met her by chance. But—the attitude in which I saw you both was somewhat familiar, even for old friends—scarcely one, I fancy, in which you would care to see your wife and—any other man."

He looked at her, and a smile replaced the frown. "My darling," he said, "I thought you were too perfect a woman for jealousy!"

That word stung and irritated her as no other could have done. "Oh!" she cried, with sudden passion, "how little you understand! Jealous! No; that is a word that lowers one to suspicion, and intrigue, and distrust."

"Yet you followed me here?" he said, and could have cut his tongue out the instant he said it.

"You can think—that," she said, and rose slowly to her feet, and looked at him with so grand and queenly a disdain that he felt ashamed and repentant, and could have thrown himself at her feet in his bitter remorse. "I am not jealous," she said steadily and coldly, and a deep flush rose to her cheeks and seemed to scorch their delicate pallor, "and still less would I be guilty of the meanness of spying on any man's actions; but without perfect trust and perfect truth, there cannot be perfect love. Perhaps it is as well to find out our mistake now; it is an easy one to remedy."

She drew the ring off her finger—the betrothal ring he had placed there in the library of Porhynna.

The full meaning of the action—of all he had gained, all he would lose—flashed rapidly before him. "Doris," he cried, "you can't mean it!—you don't mean it! Is this your love?"

For a moment her calmness forsook her, her lips quivered, the colour left her cheek. Then, with an effort, she controlled herself again.

"Tell me one thing," she said. "Were you with her in London?"

He would have given the world to be able to tell a lie then; but, for once, the glibness and ease with which he usually evaded a disagreeable truth, forsook him.

"Yes," he muttered, sullenly.

"I might have known," she said, and turned aside for a moment to hide the bitter tears that sprang into her eyes. So for *this* she had suffered and grieved and waited in that hateful agony of suspense; for this her letter had been ignored and unanswered; for this—that he might amuse himself with a vain and shallow *intriguante*, who scarcely even cared to hide her fancy of the hour.

"Is that too hard a thing to forgive?" he asked, with sudden humility. "Dear, believe me, I hated myself for my folly; I hated her for her tempting; but men are fools you know—and I—I always told you I was no hero."

"Oh! hush! hush!" she cried, as if his words hurt

her; and indeed they did. "A hero! God knows I never expected you to be *that*! I only thought of you as a man with some self-respect, some notion of honour and fidelity. But you have shown you possess neither. Only one week away from me, and already another to take my place."

"By Heaven! No!" he cried, stormily, "not your place, I swear! You are a woman of the world; you know what men are; tempted, allured by their baser nature, even if true at heart!"

"True—at heart!" she echoed, bitterly. "Is that what you call your elf? Your notion of truth must be very different to mine."

He threw himself at her feet, and clasped the folds of her gown. "I am not worthy of you! I always told you that," he cried, in sudden bitterness of humiliation. "But oh, Doris, forgive me! Indeed, indeed, my love for you has never wavered. You cannot call that brief straying of the senses—infidelity. I swear to you I will never see her again, if you desire it."

She drew the velvet folds away from his hands, and signed to him to rise as a queen might have signed to a penitent and forgiven subject. "Listen," she said. "A fidelity that is *exact*ed, ceases to be fidelity. I trusted you, and you lied to me. If I forgave and took you back, that lie and that sin of yours would be always between us; its memory would poison all my peace. I could not forget, even if I forgave. You must blame my nature, even as you bid me blame yours. We have made a mistake, you and I. It is better to discover and own it now. Later, it might have been—too late."

She spoke quite calmly and gently. He had no suspicion of the humiliation her proud heart suffered, of the sense of outrage and dishonour that stung her afresh with every fresh effort at extenuation his lips framed. She only longed to be alone, to be quit of his presence, which bore the stamp and seal of another woman's passion, which held the shame and treachery of her kiss and her embrace. All that had been sacred to herself, the love that had looked so beautiful and holy a thing, now seemed nothing purer or better than the sport of a man's idle passions, and

forsworn faith. As she looked at him where he knelt at her feet, she only said to herself: "There, too, lies my trust and faith in man's honour," and something like impatience and disgust swept over her previous calm, and made itself felt in look and tone.

"Do not let me detain you," she said. "You have some engagement, I see by your dress, and I think there is no need to say more. No doubt your error is a venial one, as the world judges. No doubt another woman would excuse and forgive. But I am not—quite—like other women. I told you that long ago, if you remember, and I think it would be wiser and better for us both to forget what, after all, was only the idyll of a week—to *you*."

He rose then, stung to the quick by the contempt of her voice, the disgust of her face. Yet in her pain she was scarcely conscious of how she pained him. She only longed to be free of his presence; to be alone, and think out for herself the possible results of her action.

"Am I to understand," he said huskily, "that you wish to be—free?"

"From falsehood and treachery—yes," she said, and her voice was cold as pride and contempt—of him, of her rival, of herself—could make it.

He bowed. He was bitterly hurt and offended—he, who in all his light and easy conquests and victorious life had never been arraigned, or unforgiven by any woman.

"I—I asked for your patience once," he said; "I asked for your pardon to-night. It is the first time I have asked for either from man or woman. This—this woman is nothing to me. My love for you has never wavered; only—one is not always master of oneself, but, of course, you cannot believe, you cannot understand. I do not blame you."

"It would be strange," she said, "if you could."

His cheek reddened slightly. "You are too good a woman for your time—your age," he said. "I—I have lived in a world that is only a temple of lies and shams and broken faiths, and cheated honour. Doubtless you are right. I am utterly unworthy, only, believe it or not, I love you as I have never loved any other woman."

"A love that cannot give even one week's fidelity, is

scarce deserving of the name, I think," she said. "But why waste time in arguments? We have said all it is needful to say. Go to her; she will console you as she has consoled you before, if indeed, you need—consolation."

She moved away; with those last words severing the tie that had bound them, as ruthlessly and as utterly as steel might sever a skein of silk.

His face grew white as death. He said not a word, only bent his head and passed from the room, and from her sight.

Before her on the table glittered and sparkled the ring she had placed there, the ring he had slipped on her slender white finger with a kiss, and a whisper of the marriage circlet that should so soon replace it.

As the door closed, her eye fell on it. She snatched it up, and obeying an impulse as unlike herself as it was passionate and—womanly, tossed the shining bauble into the heart of the bright wood fire.

"So ends my dream!" she said.



CHAPTER XV.

“AND WITH YOU—PEACE.”

THE night had fallen, dark with wind and rain, and black storm clouds that gathered thick and ominous in the west. On the wild Cornish coast there sounded only the echoing thunders of the mad sea, tearing itself into shreds of spray against the frowning headlands.

The old Hall of Trevanion rocked in the blast, and the wind tore at its ivied porch and shook its shuttered windows, and dashed the rain drops like pellets against the closed door. Its two strange inmates sat together over a fire of dull peat. The vast room was but dimly lit, and felt chilly and damp in the dreary autumn night. Both seemed wrapped in thought, and heeded neither storm, nor blast, nor thundering wave. Habit had accustomed them to such outbreaks of nature, or perhaps they were both too far advanced in the pursuit of mysticism, and the problems of invisible worlds, to heed their own more immediate surroundings.

The dark, inscrutable face and glowing eyes of Mandhar Ram were fastened on the dull glow of firelight. His hands were crossed upon his breast, his figure looked as if carved in stone, so still it was and rigid.

Presently the old man lifted his head and looked across at his silent companion.

“Will he come—to-night?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the Oriental. “He is almost here—now. Have you decided to tell him the truth at last?”

“It was you who bade me tell him,” the old man said complainingly. “I see no use — what purpose can it serve?”

"He will insist on being told; he comes here solely for that reason. It is as well he should know. You were so proud of your discovery, you would not believe my warnings; now you have seen what man alone can make of man—a thing of impulses, passions, follies and ungovernable desires. Were it not that I know only too well the transitory nature of physical life, that it is merely a shadow flitting through a series of events, I would not have consented to an experiment which has produced such dire results."

"He was well enough while he was with us," the old man muttered gloomily.

"True, but the feelings and desires that make a student were wanting, and with every year of advancing manhood the evil impulses of the lower nature acquired increasing ascendancy. You are a great scientist, my friend, and all your days and all your life have been spent in the pursuit of wisdom. You have learned so much, that nature seemed to hold no secrets into which you could not pierce; the cause and generation of life, the principles and elements of the body, the whole complex mystery of the physical formation of man was to you a simple and perfectly practical pursuit, such as any other branch of physical science. How proud you were, how triumphant, how determined to find a subject for experiment. No use to warn, no use to caution. To you Life meant nothing but the vital spark which makes the blood flow, the limbs move, the heart beat, the brain act. What said I, years ago, when accident favoured your design, and the sea yielded up its prey and, unknown because unsuspected, you had before you and in your power that empty shell of humanity into whose cold veins you might pour life afresh?"

"I poured it," cried the old man, his eyes brightening with sudden rapture. "Success was mine at last. What mattered years of study and of toil, what mattered loss of youth and health? Alone, unaided, I had mastered the great secret. For me the dead lived, for me the living arose—spoke—moved—became a being even as I myself, instead of the cold corruption I had rescued."

"Hush!" cried the Oriental, warningly, his eyes flashing suddenly into the gloom beyond.

Unseen, unheard, a figure had entered through the curtained doorway, and now advanced towards them both.

"I came but to ask you a question," he said, unheeding the feeble hand outstretched in welcome. "But it is answered ere I ask it. When I said to Mandhar Ram a few months ago, 'In what respect do I differ from my fellow-man?' he refused to answer me. Now—I have learnt the reason. I do not know whether you consider the gift you bestowed upon me is worth the trouble and toil of the long years that antedated its discovery, but as the result of the experiment I am inclined to say—not. Life, actual physical life, has its charms no doubt; the bird on its bough, the free creatures of the desert, the fish in the depths of its ocean home—all these shared in common with me the light and the air, and the beauty of the world in which they found themselves. Like them I enjoyed, and questioned neither cause nor continuance of enjoyment. But I am like them no longer. The dim suspicions that had crossed me, the knowledge of a growing tendency to evil—the debasing power and strength of passions that were like unchained devils in my soul, all these asserted themselves at one and the same moment, and in their strength and power I learnt—myself. While yet that strength lasted, while yet the kingship and the lordship of that mighty force whirled me like a leaf on its wild torrent, I stood alone in the black midnight of a darkness that mortals scarce conceive. Out of its depths and in its fearful vaults I only saw shapes of terror, I only heard voices of fiends, and in my misery I cursed my fate, and cursed the woman who had tempted me, and on her head I called down vengeance for all that she had robbed me of—the one pure feeling my heart had ever known——"

His voice broke, his face, white and ghastly, looked back at the stern, cold face of Mandhar Ram. "I know what you would ask," he said brokenly, disjointedly. "I remembered too late your warnings. The whole evil force within me spent itself on that curse, on that desire. Ere another day dawned, the woman who had tempted me was—*dead*."

There was silence, utter stony silence. The old man

shuddered with horror. The calm face of Mandhar Ram grew chill and dark. The younger man sank slowly down at his feet, and hid his face on his clasped hands.

"Take back your gift," he cried, in passionate entreaty. "In all the life you granted there is but one bright hour—but one pure and perfect dream; and the hour has faded into eternal night, and the dream has perished with the waking. Stained with sin, and cursed with evil, so I have come back from the world where you sent me—hateful in my own sight, weighted by memories that have not one redeeming virtue. Since I have learnt my fatal power, I am in terror of myself—of every passing feeling—of every possible passion. Who I am, I ask no longer; but—*what I am*—I abhor with mortal terror, and more than mortal hate!"

"You may well abhor it," said Mandhar Ram gravely. "I, who have pitied you all your life, can only pity you still. The blame rests with your vain-glorious creator. He, in the pride and triumph of his heart, in the ardour of discovery, breathed back into your rescued body, that the waves had cast up at our feet, the vital spark that men call life. But he could not, with that physical life of which he had learnt the nature and the secret, give you also its higher principle—the one mysterious Divine spark which is the source of universal spirit, and leaves that source but to return to it again. In all respects you were human as Humanity, but with one strange exception—that with each seven years the vital current began to flow more weakly and feebly in your veins, and necessitated again the replenishment that had once restored it. With that need came always the desire to return here, no matter in what part of the world you might be. Had you not done so, you would have simply passed out of life in a trance of exhaustion."

Trevanion rose to his feet. He looked changed—worn—haggard, as if years of suffering and remorse had passed over his head.

"Then—if I did not return?" he said.

"You would simply die the common death of humanity."

He stood for a moment silently regarding them both.

Then his eyes wandered round the room, that strange temple of science where his strange life had had its unnatural re-birth.

Slowly he advanced to the scared and trembling figure crouched on the chair by the dull ashes of the dying fire.

"Between us," he said, "there is not much to say. You best know whether your motives deserve praise, or blame. I am only—their result! A few years longer I must bear the burden with which you have cursed me. . . . You need not fear that I shall ever return again to seek, from your hands, its renewal."

He laid his lips, with a sudden impulse of tenderness, on the white head bowed before him in the abject repentance of age that knows itself helpless, then turned to Mandhar Ram and held out his hand to him.

"Whither would you go?" asked the Oriental gravely. "At least stay here till the storm has spent itself."

The young man shook his head. "Out of the storm I came," he said, "it is fitting that I should return to it. Peace be with you, Mandhar Ram. You, at least, have always been friend and counsellor to me."

The Oriental bent his stately head in the grave and formal salutation of his race. "And with you—Peace," he said.

And with those words breathing their soft and kindly meaning over the passionate woe and warfare of his heart, Trevanion went out into the bleak and bitter night.

THE END

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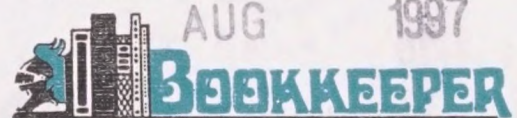
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